

S E R M O N S

FOR THE USE OF

F A M I L I E S.

V O L. II.

The SECOND EDITION.

By WILLIAM ENFIELD.



L O N D O N:

Printed for JOSEPH JOHNSON, Bookseller, No. 72.
St. Paul's Church-Yard.

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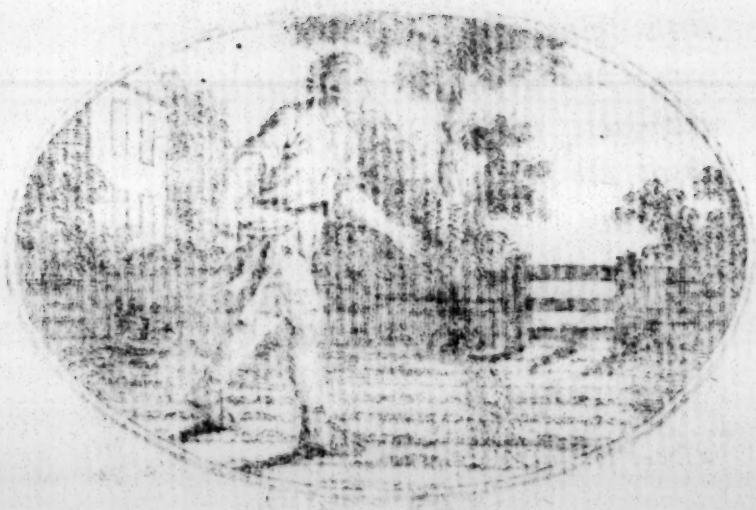
FOR THE USE OF



BY WILLIAM BENTLEY

THE PASTOR

OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY



THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY

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OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY

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S E R M O N I.

MORALITY THE PROPER SUB-
JECT OF PREACHING.

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VOL. II.

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S E R M O N I.

T I T U S III. 8, 9.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

THOUGH the religion of Jesus Christ is evidently better calculated, than any other religion in the

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world,

world, to promote the practice of virtue among mankind; it cannot be denied, that it hath not actually produced such happy effects upon the dispositions and manners of men, as might have been expected. The corrupt principles and vicious practices of multitudes, who call themselves christians, have long been a just ground of lamentation to the friends of christianity, and furnished its enemies with an occasion of ridicule and reproach.

Among the many causes which have concurred to render our holy religion thus unsuccessful, the indifference and neglect, with which many sects of christians have been accustomed to treat the moral precepts of the gospel, deserves, I think, to be considered as none of the least. Christianity hath long been looked upon rather as a system of speculative opinions, than as a practical institution of religion, designed

ed to regulate the dispositions and improve the characters of men. Its professors have generally been more solicitous to understand mysterious points of doctrine, occasionally mentioned in the New Testament, than to study and obey the moral precepts which it contains ; and have valued themselves more upon their theological knowledge, and the soundness of their faith, than upon the observance of the great laws of piety, righteousness and charity. And, in consequence of this, they have considered the duties of morality, as subjects scarcely worthy to be insisted upon in public discourses, or, at best, only as matters of a secondary and inferior nature ; and they have esteemed that preaching the most excellent, which hath had for its main object, the establishment of some favourite part of their system of faith ; the refutation of some heretical opinion ; or

the explanation of some intricate and difficult passage of scripture.

These ideas of Christianity, and these sentiments concerning the nature and design of preaching, have, I apprehend, greatly obstructed the progress of virtue and religion in the world. By giving an imaginary importance to subjects of speculation, concerning which wise and good men have always thought, and will probably continue to think, differently, they have turned aside the attention and zeal of mankind from those things, in which their present and future happiness are really and principally concerned.

My design, in this discourse, is to counteract the influence of these prejudices, as far as I am able, by shewing that the principal end of public preaching is, to recommend the practice of virtue; and that those who
attend

attend upon it, should be best satisfied with such discourses as clearly explain, and strongly inculcate the several branches of morality, as it comprehends our duty to our Maker, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves, without entering farther into subjects of speculation and controversy, than is of evident importance to the moral improvement and happiness of mankind.

With this view I have made choice of the words of the text; in which the Apostle *Paul*, after having given a particular detail of moral virtues, instructs his beloved pupil *Titus*, to inculcate the practice of these duties upon his fellow christians; and to allow no place in his public discourses to those enquiries and debates, which instead of being useful to his hearers, would only serve to create dissensions and animosities among them. “This
“ is a faithful saying, and these things

“ I will that thou affirm constantly,
“ that they which have believed in
“ God might be careful to maintain
“ good works: these things are good
“ and profitable unto men: but avoid
“ foolish questions and genealogies,
“ and contentions, and strivings about
“ the law; for they are unprofitable
“ and vain.”

In support of the sentiment suggested in these words, I observe, in the first place, That if the duties of morality and religion were made the principal subjects of public preaching, it would remove or prevent many evils, which have arisen from the contrary practice.

The divisions and contentions, the persecutions and cruelties, which have disgraced the christian church, from its first establishment to the present day, are so well known, that I may be excused

excused the painful task of entering into a particular enumeration of them. It will be sufficient for my present purpose to remark, that these evils, dreadful as they have been, are chiefly to be ascribed to the enthusiasm, or the artifice, of those who have called themselves teachers of religion. Among the leaders of the church, there have always been some weak and vulgar spirits, who have tamely submitted to the authority of their forefathers, and who have been devoted to mysticism and superstition. There have been others, whose recluse manner of life, and scholastic habit of thinking, have given them a particular fondness for metaphysical and theological controversies, and led them to imagine, that the cobweb-distinctions which their own fancies have woven, and the curious speculations which have engaged their whole attention, must be of infinite importance to the world. There

have been a third class who, though they have been sufficiently aware of the weakness of the former, and the vanity of the latter, have assumed all the sanctity and zeal of both, that they might avail themselves of the ignorance, prejudices and passions of the people. All these have united (though with very different views) to divert the attention of mankind from the obvious and important subjects of pure religion and morality ; to puzzle and perplex them with abstruse and uninteresting debates ; to direct their zeal to the support of particular articles of belief, and modes of worship ; and to inspire them with a spirit of pride and censoriousness.

Hence arose the furious dissensions, and bloody persecutions which distracted and dishonoured the early ages of Christianity. Hence arose the whole system of pompous rites and cere-

ceremonies ; of absurd and pernicious tenets ; and of ecclesiastical tyranny, which hath so long subsisted in the Church of *Rome*. Hence hath arisen that endless variety of sects and parties, into which the christian world is divided, and (what is much more to be lamented) that alienation and disaffection ; that intolerant and persecuting spirit ; which the different sects of Christians have always discovered, and still, alas ! too frequently discover, towards each other. Had the teachers of religion been content, to leave those things undetermined, which are in their own nature doubtful, and to pass by, without notice, such things as are in themselves of little or no importance ; had they been so consistent with their profession, and so much the friends of mankind, as to have employed their abilities and influence, in reproving and discountenancing vice, and recommending the practice of universal

versal righteousness; the history of the christian church had not been filled with so many tales of horror and distress; nor would christians themselves have done so much to arm the enemies of their holy religion with the weapons of ridicule and contempt.

The time however, seems to be at length arrived, in which men are beginning to see the folly of hating and persecuting one another, for a difference in opinion, on subjects concerning which it is impossible that they should be agreed. And shameful indeed must be the weakness, and fatal the delusion of mankind, if the experience of so many ages hath not been sufficient to teach them this one plain, but important lesson, That all zealous contentions, about particular modes of faith or worship, are unfriendly to the interests of religion, and the happiness of the world. It is
the

the peculiar felicity of the age and country in which we live, that the heat of religious controversy is abated, and the flames of persecution are extinguished. That blind veneration for authority, which hath so long been supported by the artifice of interested men, is on the decline ; the zeal and fury of religious sects are subsiding ; the minds of men are gradually opening ; an unconfined freedom of enquiry is encouraged ; and, a manly openness and generosity of behaviour, unrestrained by the narrow prejudices and little attachments of a party, is continually gaining ground. From these circumstances one may hope, that the present time is the dawning of a happy day, in which all distinctions of sects shall be abolished, and all dissensions and animosities will be forgotten ; in which we shall all love one another with pure hearts fervently, and shall cordially unite in the
worship

worship of one God, the Father of us all. And, what can be more likely to hasten the approach of this delightful period, than for the ministers of religion to overlook, and as much as possible discourage, every party-distinction and useless speculation, and constantly to direct the attention of their hearers to those subjects, concerning which we are all agreed, and in which we are all immediately interested; I mean the great duties of morality and religion?

Another reason, why these duties should be the constant subjects of public preaching, is, because we may speak concerning them with the greatest perspicuity and certainty.

Though discourses have been delivered, and volumes have been written, without end, on the subjects of metaphysical and theological controversy;
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are we not still, with regard to many of these subjects, as far from a final determination, and absolute certainty, as ever? Is there not still as great diversity of opinion as ever, not only among the vulgar and illiterate, but even among those who profess to have formed a judgment for themselves, by diligent and impartial study? Why then should preachers perplex and confound the understandings of their hearers, and set them at variance with each other, by insisting upon topics which have no immediate and obvious connection with morality, and concerning which they themselves are far from being agreed?

It is acknowledged, that there are general principles of religion and christianity, which are of fundamental importance, and are capable of the clearest and most satisfactory proof; and these ought to be so frequently insisted

insisted upon in public discourses, that christians may be made acquainted with the grounds of their faith and hope, and that their religion may be the effect of fair examination and rational conviction. But beyond this, it does not appear to be necessary that topics of speculation should be admitted into public discourses. Other opinions of inferior importance, and attended with lower degrees of evidence, seem much more proper to employ the leisure of the closet or the schools, than to engage the attention of the multitude. Especially since there are subjects of much greater moment, which carry with them the plainest marks of truth and certainty.

That we ought to venerate the most excellent and perfect of all Beings ; that we should devoutly and thankfully acknowledge the hand, which feeds and clothes us, and gives
us

us richly all things to enjoy ; that we should chearfully submit ourselves to the direction of that Being who ordereth all things well ; that we should observe the great laws of equity in all our transactions with mankind ; that we should pity, and, if possible, relieve a brother in distress ; that we should love our friends, be grateful to our benefactors, and forgive our enemies ; that we should behave with honour and generosity, kindness and charity, towards all men ; that we should govern ourselves with prudence and discretion, and diligently cultivate the powers which God hath given us : these are truths as obvious as they are important ; truths, concerning which all mankind in every country, and of every sect, are agreed. They are, therefore, of all others, the most proper subjects of public discourse.

I add,

I add, This strain of preaching is best adapted to the understanding and taste of the generality of mankind.

Among the people who usually compose our religious assemblies, how few are there, who have formed a habit of close and accurate reasoning, or acquired a taste for speculation and science! how few are there, who have either leisure, or inclination, to qualify themselves, by reading and study, for entering into the merits of a religious controversy, or judging of the propriety and beauty of a scripture-criticism! The generality of mankind are much more usefully employed, than in learning to reason logically, or dispute warmly, upon controverted articles of faith, or to determine the precise signification of difficult passages of scripture. Why then should we wonder, if the people are lost in those intricate labyrinths of scientific theology,
in

in which their teachers themselves are so often puzzled and confounded ; or that dry and laboured dissertations on such subjects should commonly be delivered to dull and sleepy, or careless and inattentive, auditories ? The people meet together, in religious assemblies, not to have their heads filled with useless speculations, but to have their hearts warmed with pious and virtuous sentiments, and if through the weakness or the vanity of the preacher, they fail of their end, what can be expected, but that they should go away disappointed and dissatisfied ?

In the words of a late celebrated writer * — “ To preach to shew the
 “ extent of our reading, or the sub-
 “ tleties of our wit ; to parade it, in
 “ the eyes of the vulgar, with the beg-
 “ garly accounts of a little learning,
 “ tinselled over with a few words,

* STERNE.

“ which

“ which glitter, but convey little light,
“ and less warmth; is a dishonest use
“ of the poor single half-hour in a
“ week, which is put into our hands.
“ It is not preaching the gospel—but
“ ourselves. For my own part (adds
“ he) I had rather direct five words
“ point blank to the heart.”—

And little does that preacher know of the pleasure which there is in fixing the attention, interesting the passions, and awakening the feelings of an audience, on the great subjects of religion and morality, who had not much rather speak five words to the heart, than gain the fruitless admiration and applause of the multitude, for the elegance of his style, the depth of his learning, or the soundness of his faith.

If a preacher endeavours to establish
received opinions, or if he takes pains

to overturn them; if he recites the comments of the most learned and celebrated fathers of the Church on difficult texts of scripture, and supports them; or, if on the other hand, he attempts to explain them in a different manner, and, on this explanation, to ground a more rational scheme of faith: he may perhaps amuse and please a few; but he will, most probably, offend some, soar above the understandings of many, and reach the hearts of none. But if he exhorts his hearers to maintain good works; if he appeals to their consciences for the reasonableness and importance of the duties which he recommends; if he gives them just and lively representations of the influence, which the observance or neglect of these duties will have upon their peace and happiness; if he touches the springs of gratitude, benevolence and humanity, of self-love, of hope and fear, in their hearts,

hearts, and calls forth every power and passion within them, to assist him in pleading the cause of virtue: he will generally find his audience attentive, and serious, and may hope to send them away—not only pleased—but improved.

Farther, we may remark, That to exhort Christians to maintain good works, is the proper business of the Christian Ministry.

Jesus Christ was eminently a preacher of righteousness. This character he supported, during the whole course of his public ministry. Examine the spirit and tendency of his discourses, and you will see, that they are all calculated to discountenance vice, and inculcate the practice of virtue. This is remarkably the case, with regard to his sermon on the mount. Through the whole of that long discourse, there

is nothing of an abstruse or speculative nature ; nothing which was not immediately designed to correct the faults, or improve the virtues of his audience. It contains a great variety of excellent rules for the direction of our conduct, in every relation and circumstance of life. And as the discourses of our Saviour were all adapted to promote the interests of virtue in the world, so this was the great end for which he lived and died. All the doctrines which he taught ; all the wonderful works which he performed ; all the pains and sufferings to which he submitted ; were with this immediate view, that he might take away sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. “ For this purpose was “ the Son of God manifested, that he “ might destroy the works of the devil.” “ He gave himself for us, “ that he might redeem us from all “ iniquity, and purify unto himself a
pecu-

“ peculiar people, zealous of good
“ works.”

Now, by what means can the teachers of religion so properly merit the character of *christian ministers*, as by pursuing the same important plan, with him whom they acknowledge as their Lord and Master? If, like him, they employ their utmost abilities, in discountenancing all immorality and wickedness, and recommending a careful observance of the duties of piety and virtue; if, like him, they make use of every argument, arising from the nature of things; the righteousness and clemency of the divine administration; and the prospect of a future state, to persuade men to abstain from that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good; they may surely, with the strictest propriety, be stiled *Gospel-preachers*. Since Jesus Christ was sent into the world, that

he might save men, by turning them from their iniquities; since his religion is not a speculative system, designed to amuse the curious, but a practical institution, adapted to improve the dispositions, and regulate the manners of men; it cannot be doubted, that to inculcate the practice of universal righteousness, by every motive which reason and christianity suggest—and this alone—is properly *evangelical preaching*.

The last consideration, which I shall mention, to evince the reasonableness of making the duties of morality and religion the constant subjects of public preaching, is, That they are of the highest importance to the happiness of mankind, and that, in comparison with them, all other subjects are unprofitable and vain.

I am aware, that those, who have studied themselves into a fondness for any particular system of theology, generally fancy, that it is of the utmost consequence to the world; and imagine that they shall be greatly defective in their duty to the public, if they neglect to support and propagate it. The followers of *Calvin*, *Arminius*, *Arius*, and *Socinus*, in the midst of all their contentions, are generally agreed in one thing; to consider their respective schemes as essential to the honour, and to the very existence of Christianity, and as of the greatest importance to mankind. But, what would an indifferent spectator, who had enlisted himself in no party, think of these disputes? Would he not see, that each sect have an equal right (and have generally made use of their right) to assert the importance of their own favourite system, and to censure and condemn those of others? Would he not
from

from hence reasonably infer, that they are all equally wrong, if not in their opinions themselves, however in the stress which they lay upon them, and the zeal with which they defend them? Would he not ascribe the vehemence of each party, to that bigotry and prejudice, which are common to them all?

Or, if we judge from facts; whence have arisen those contentions and persecutions which have already been taken notice of, but from the zeal and fury, with which both clergy and laity have supported particular systems of faith and modes of worship? And what good effects have the propagation of any system, or the establishment of any sect, produced, which have been at all a counterbalance for these great and dreadful evils? Have the members of any one particular denomination of Christians been univer-

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sally

fally more honest and upright; more benevolent and compassionate; more faithful and kind in their domestic relations; more steady in their friendships; or more useful to the world, than others? Is it not evident from experience, that there are both good and bad men, of all sects, and of all persuasions? Now, is it not natural to conclude from hence, that the establishment of any particular scheme of faith is of little importance to the virtue or happiness of mankind? And may we not properly address all religious zealots, in the words of *Eliphaz* to *Job*, “How long will ye reason
“ with unprofitable talk, and with
“ speeches wherewith ye can do no
“ good?”

On the other hand, if the ministers of religion make it the sole end of their office to promote the practice of virtue; if they endeavour, in all
their

their public discourses, to inspire men with the fear and love of their maker, and a chearful submission to his government; with sentiments of honour, generosity, and benevolence towards each other; and with a due concern to improve in every thing which is amiable and praise-worthy; they will be continually performing the most important service to the world, and will contribute their part towards rendering their hearers happy in themselves, useful to society, and acceptable to Almighty God.

Viewed in this light, how rational, how honourable, how important doth the ministerial character appear! How delightful is the office, which calls the Christian minister to guard his brethren against the snares of vice; to cherish and strengthen in their hearts the principles of religion and virtue; and to employ his best abilities in doing

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good!

good! With what satisfaction may a preacher of righteousness review a life, which he hath spent—not in kindling up the flames of dissention and animosity; not in encouraging a spirit of bigotry and persecution; not in amusing his hearers with useless speculations; but in serving the cause of virtue, and advancing the most important interests of his fellow-creatures! With what joy may he expect hereafter to receive this delightful sentence of approbation, from his Maker and Judge; “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

These reflections are abundantly sufficient to shew the reasonableness and importance of the Apostle’s advice in the text; and to apologize for the moral practical strain of preaching, which appears to be gaining ground amongst us.

You

You will not therefore my brethren, be surprized—nor I hope disappointed—if you seldom hear your ministers insisting upon topics of speculation, controversy, or criticism. They esteem it inconsistent with the nature of their office, and with the duty which they owe to you, to waste the few, but important moments, with which you entrust them, in entertaining you with curious and uninteresting enquiries, or in leading you through the barren fields of theological disputation. They apprehend, that it will be more for your improvement and pleasure, that they should spend your time in explaining and recommending the great duties of morality and religion, on the performance of which your present and future happiness so immediately depends. And they trust, that you will agree with them in thinking, that they can never be so properly and usefully employed, as when they

are exhorting you to maintain good works.

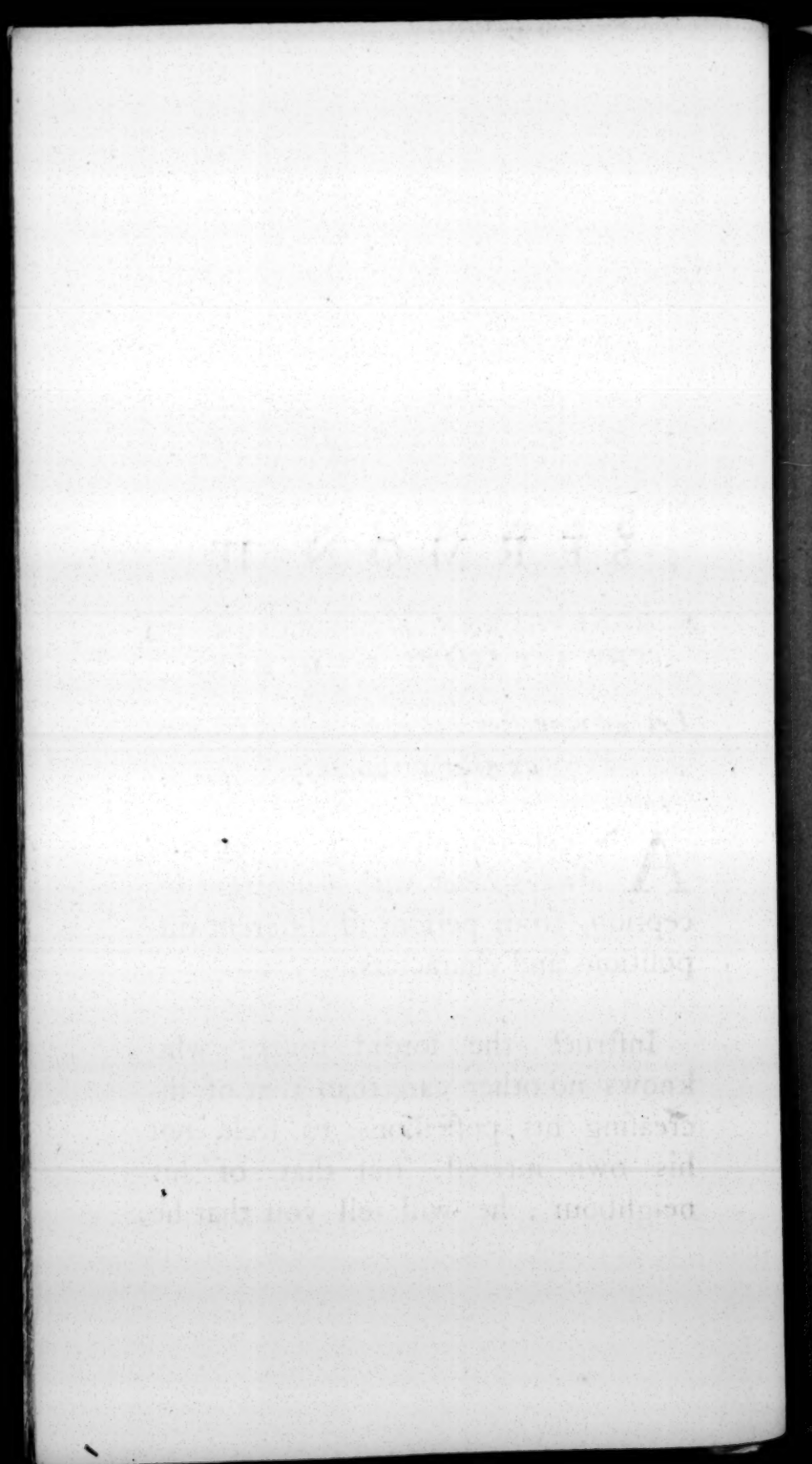
I will conclude this discourse by earnestly recommending it to you, to take heed that you hear, with the same design with which your ministers do or ought to preach, that you may be confirmed in all goodness. Attend upon public preaching, not with a view to have your favourite opinions established, your curiosity gratified, or your imaginations amused; but to have your evil habits corrected, your good dispositions strengthened, and your characters continually improved. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only. And may the God of grace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen!

S E R M O N II.

A BENEVOLENT ATTENTION TO
THE INTEREST OF OTHERS
RECOMMENDED.

*Non nobis solum nati sumus, ortusque nostri partem
patria vindicat, partem parentes, partem amici.*

CIC.



S E R M O N II.

I C O R. x. 24.

*Let no man seek his own, but every man
another's wealth.*

AN exhortation of this kind will always meet with a different reception, from persons of different dispositions and characters.

Instruct the sordid miser, who knows no other care than that of increasing his possessions, to seek, not his own interest, but that of his neighbour ; he will tell you that he
is

is too much engaged in his own affairs to attend to those of others, and that it is every man's business to look to himself. Address this advice to the frugal and busy man of the world, who is anxious to improve his fortune and rise to independence; it is doubtful whether you will meet with a much better reception: for though avarice may not have taken full possession of his soul, and destroyed every humane and generous affection within him, the multiplicity of his cares will afford him little leisure, and his eager desire of wealth will leave him little inclination, to attend to the interests of others. He will think that he sufficiently complies with the precept of the text, if he extends his concern as far as his domestic connections reach, and is careful to provide for those of his own house.

Inculcate

Inculcate the same lesson upon such as devote themselves to gaiety and dissipation; they will acknowledge the excellence of your doctrine; they will confess themselves enamoured with the charms of benevolence; they will boast of their philanthropy, and express the warmest wishes for the happiness of mankind. But little besides generous professions, and good wishes, are to be expected from persons of this cast: for their time is so constantly employed in the pursuit of their own amusement and pleasure, and they expend their possessions so liberally upon themselves, that it is not in their power to pay much attention to the concerns of others.

Exhort the votaries of ambition and power, “not to seek their own, but every man another’s wealth;” they will tell you, that to do this is the pleasure and glory of their lives; that
it

it is public spirit, and love to their country, which dictates all their measures, and inspires them in all their actions. But the history of mankind forbids us to place implicit confidence in such professions as these; and instructs us, that disinterested patriotism is a precious treasure, lodged only in the hearts of those, whose superior wisdom and goodness give them a real independence, by raising them above the smiles or the frowns of fortune.

Great however as the multitude is of those who seek their own profit, without regard to the profit of others, there are some to be found (and I trust the number is not inconsiderable) whose hearts are too large to be confined within the narrow limits of their own concerns; who, with a natural and unaffected sensibility, can interest themselves in the welfare of all around them, participating their
joys,

joys, and sharing their distresses ; and whose feeling souls are susceptible of all the refined and godlike pleasures of doing good. Such persons as these will easily understand the full import of the Apostle's exhortation in the text ; will receive the word into good and honest hearts ; and will bring forth the fruits of righteousness and mercy in their lives. On such good ground may the seed of the word be now sown ; that it may bear much fruit, to the benefit of mankind, and to the glory of God !

It is almost needless to observe, that the Apostle cannot be supposed, in the text, to prohibit or discourage all regard to our own interests. Self-love is the most active principle in the human mind ; and to seek our own happiness is to obey the first law of our nature. And certainly none of the precepts of Christianity ought to be explained

plained in such a manner as would be inconsistent with those eternal laws, which the Almighty hath written upon our hearts. It is then only that our attention to our own concerns becomes culpable, when they so entirely employ our thoughts, and engross our affections, as to leave us neither leisure nor inclination to pay a due regard to the interests of others. When this is the case, then self-love degenerates into selfishness; then the sacred flame of benevolence is extinguished, and the most base and pernicious passions are kindled, in the heart; then a man becomes capable of doing the meanest and most contemptible, and even the vilest and most criminal actions. From this bitter fountain have proceeded all those streams of injustice, fraud, oppression, inhumanity and cruelty, which have so long been destructive of the happiness of mankind. Suppose a man divested of the
gene-

generous feelings of benevolence, and entirely involved in his own concerns, and it will be impossible to say what deeds of shame and horror he will not commit. In the balance of his perverted judgment, honour, gratitude, friendship, natural affection, humanity and religion, will all be outweighed by INTEREST. If, to accomplish his own private selfish ends, it be necessary that the most sacred engagements should be violated; that the meanest arts of fraud should be practised; that the character, the prosperity, or the happiness of a friend, a benefactor, or a brother should be sacrificed; that the deserted orphan, or the mourning widow, should be deprived of their little store; or that the strongest ties of nature should be broken through; INTEREST commands, and she must be obeyed. Having given himself up to her dominion, it is not in his power to say, "Hitherto
" will

“ will I go, but no farther.” Such is the hateful nature, and dangerous tendency of the vice against which we are cautioned in the text.

And at the same time that the Apostle dissuades us from indulging a selfish temper, he exhorts us to cultivate the contrary spirit, and to pay a constant attention to the interests, and exercise a generous concern for the welfare of our brethren. “ Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth:” that is; suffer not your thoughts and affections to be wholly engaged by that one beloved object, self; but sometimes turn away your eyes from it, and look beyond the little circle of your own affairs, to observe the condition and interest yourselves in the welfare of your brethren. Behold the prosperity of such as are happy; and let the sight of their felicity increase your own.

own. Take notice of the calamities and distresses of the unfortunate, and let their afflictions penetrate your hearts. “ Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” And be not idle spectators of the joys or the sorrows of others; look around you for opportunities of alleviating the miseries and increasing the happiness of your brethren; and manifest, by a constant series of generous and worthy actions, that you live, not for yourselves alone, but for your families, your friends, your country, and the world.—Such is the import of the Apostle’s exhortation in the text. How well it deserves our most serious regard will appear from the following considerations.

In the first place, it is perfectly agreeable to our nature, as men, that we should be attentive to the interests of others, as well as to our own.

Exa-

Examine the constitution of the human mind, and you will see that it is endued by its Maker, with principles and affections of a social as well as of a private and personal kind; and that we are as really, though perhaps less strongly, impelled by the former to interest ourselves in the welfare of our fellow-creatures, as by the latter to provide for our own happiness. Doth not nature inspire such as are connected with each other, in the relations of domestic life, with a mutual affection, which forms an almost indissoluble bond of union, and which is a source of the sweetest endearments and most exquisite pleasures which human life affords? Doth not nature prompt us to look beyond our domestic connections, and interest ourselves in the concerns of our brethren, of mankind in general? Is it possible for us to behold a fellow-creature in distress, to whatever country he belongs, what-

whatever religion he professes, or however unknown he may be to us, without feeling the emotions of sympathy and compassion? Doth not nature teach us to look upon perpetual solitude with aversion and horror, and to engage in the pursuits, and enjoy the pleasures of life in society? Is not the desire of obtaining the good opinion of others, and of contributing to their satisfaction and happiness, one of the principal springs which animate great and noble minds in all the important transactions of their lives? And are not all the gratifications which we receive from our senses, and all our intellectual and moral pleasures, greatly heightened by being enjoyed in the company of those we love? Will it then admit of a doubt, that nature requires us to look beyond ourselves, and to pay a constant attention to the interests of others?

A farther obligation to this duty arises from the state of mutual dependence in which mankind are placed. All the employments and occupations of society are reciprocal offices of kindness, which mankind are perpetually performing towards each other, for their mutual support and happiness. And if this exchange of services were interrupted; if every man were to attempt to live independent of his neighbour; it would be impossible for any individual to enjoy the conveniences and elegancies, and perhaps to procure even the necessaries of life. As a number of persons, by uniting their strength, may produce effects, which, while each exerted his power singly and in succession, they could never accomplish: so mankind by employing their several abilities in conjunction, and for the common good, may obtain a great variety of advantages and pleasures, which with-

out this union they could never have enjoyed. Thus the happiness of each individual is connected with that of the species; and a universal dependence is established among mankind, from which no man, however great his abilities may be, or in however exalted a station he is placed, can be free. Our obligations to regard the interests of others are then most evident. Since we are continually dependent upon our brethren, and receive most of the blessings of life through their means, what can be more reasonable, than that we should make the best returns we are able to society for the advantages we receive from it; and contribute, to the utmost of our power, towards the public welfare? No man who is not able to live in a state of entire independence upon others, can have a right to live to himself.

Ano-

Another argument, to enforce the exhortation of the text, may be taken from the pleasures of benevolence. How noble, how satisfying, how far superior to all other delights, these pleasures are, the good man, who has experienced them, alone can tell. The man, whose idol is wealth, and whose eyes the God of this world hath blinded, may imagine that no happiness is to be compared with that of adding possession to possession, beholding with his eyes the treasures which he hath amassed, and calling them all his own. The sons of ambition may glory in the splendour of appearance, the pomp of titles, and the parade of greatness; and may fancy that nothing can equal the pleasure of being honoured by his superiors, flattered by his dependents, and applauded and caressed by all the world. The voluptuary may think himself master of the true secret of happiness, and per-

persuade himself that no man knows how to live, but he who gives unbounded indulgence to his appetites and passions, and spends his days in dissipation and excess. But there are joys, with which these men, who live for themselves alone, intermeddle not; joys which those who have experienced them can testify to be infinitely superior to all the gratifications which the riches, honours, or pleasures of the world can afford.

Ye, whose tender and generous hearts naturally, and without constraint, interest themselves in the welfare of others, and teach you to make their happiness your own; ye who can never see your neighbour's success without partaking of his joy, or hear of his misfortunes, without mingling your tears with his; ye who are no less anxious to make your relations, your friends, and all with whom you

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are

are connected happy, than be so yourselves, and who “seek not your own profit, but the profit of many :” say, whether ye do not prize the tenderness and sensibility of your hearts as your best treasure ; whether ye do not experience more happiness in loving your neighbour as yourself, and doing good to all around you, as you have opportunity, than you could possibly find in possessing the greatest riches, in being advanced to the utmost height of worldly glory, or in spending your days in the midst of the most luxurious ease and indulgence.

There is nothing, from which the superior excellence of the pleasures of benevolence more plainly appears, than from this circumstance ; that they may be enjoyed through all the vicissitudes of human life, and will continue when other pleasures shall forsake us for ever. Under the greatest
reverse

reverse of fortune, and the heaviest pressure of affliction, the good man may have the satisfaction of performing some offices of kindness to others : or at least may extend his benevolent wishes to all mankind, and offer up his fervent prayers to heaven on their behalf. He may at all times be happy in the consciousness of the goodness of his heart, and in the recollection of a life devoted to the service of his fellow-creatures. Even at that season, when all his connections with this world must be broken ; when the eye which hath seen him must see him no more ; that benevolence of heart, which will increase the pain of separation from his friends, will, at the same time, yield him the best supports under it. While they are taking their last farewell of him, and weeping over his departing spirit, he will be able to sustain himself in this most painful of all moments, by reflecting, that it hath

been the business and pleasure of his life to promote their happiness; and that he shall leave behind him, in their grateful and affectionate hearts, a lasting monument of his virtues. The remembrance of his good deeds will minister consolation to his soul, in that hour when consolation is most of all needed. Conscious that he hath not lived to himself alone, but hath employed a considerable share of his time and abilities in the service of others; he will leave this world in peace, and enter upon another with a joyful hope, that, when he rests from his labours, his works will follow him.

Having said thus much concerning the internal pleasures of benevolence, it may perhaps seem of little consequence to add, that an attention to the interests of others will secure us the esteem and love of mankind. But, though the approbation of our own
hearts

hearts is above all thing else to be desired, yet the good opinion of the world is certainly not beneath the notice of a wise man. And by what means can this be so effectually obtained, as by attending to the concerns, and endeavouring to promote the happiness of others? When you see a person attentive to your interests, and desirous of giving you pleasure, you immediately imbibe a prejudice in his favour; and, without any other recommendation, or any previous acquaintance, you form a pleasing idea of his character. It may be observed as a general maxim, that there is nothing by which a man may more certainly gain the respect of mankind, or more easily insinuate himself into their affections, than by a friendly and obliging behaviour. But when to this are added frequent acts of generosity and beneficence, and constant endeavours to be useful to the world; the

character rises in importance and excellence, and not only engages the love, but commands the esteem and veneration of mankind.

But, not to insist farther upon this topic, let it be considered in the next place, That by complying with the exhortation of the Apostle in the text, we shall acquire a resemblance to the most amiable and perfect of all Beings. The Eternal Deity, whose being and happiness are independent and immutable, liveth not unto himself. He continually exerts his almighty power, and employs his perfect wisdom, to preserve and bless the numberless orders of beings which he hath created. The great Father of the universe is ever present with all parts of his happy family; ever attentive to the interests of his offspring; and ever active to promote their welfare. “ He
“ is good unto all, and his tender mer-
cies

“cies are over all his works.” To interest ourselves in the concerns of our brethren, and exert our utmost endeavours for their benefit, is then to be like God; to be like him in that which is the highest excellence and glory of his nature. And to what higher point, my brethren, can the most boundless ambition aspire; what idea can enter into the human mind more noble and sublime; what desire can be formed in the heart of man more comprehensive and exalted; than to resemble the great fountain of all good, and standard of all perfection? “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful.”

Consider, farther, that to be attentive to the interests and seek the happiness of our brethren, is to act agreeably to our christian profession and character. To be a disciple of Christ,

—what is it? If we were to judge by the representations and the practices of many who have called themselves christians, we might conclude, that it is to embrace and zealously support a particular system of speculative opinions; to be strict observers of particular rites and ceremonies; to afflict ourselves with needless and unnatural austerities; and to treat with rancour and malevolence those whose religious opinions or customs disagree with our own. But far different from this is the account, which the great author of our holy religion hath himself given us, of the characteristics by which he expects his followers to be distinguished. If we form our ideas of the christian character, either from the dispositions and conduct of Christ; from the laws which he hath given us for the regulation of our actions; or from his own express language; we shall see, that it consists in a benevolent

lent heart, and a good life. "By this," saith he, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another." Let us then, as becometh the followers of Christ, "love one another with pure hearts fervently."

Finally, it is only by obeying the precept of the text, that we can be prepared for the enjoyment of the happiness promised to sincere christians in the life to come. Though we are unable to form an adequate idea of this happiness, it is reasonable to conclude, from the constitution of the human mind, as well as from the language of scripture, that it will be of a social nature, and will, in a great measure consist in the mutual exercise of benevolent affections, and the reciprocal performance of good actions. If therefore we acquire the habits of benevolence in this life, our minds

will be in a proper state for their future employments; and we shall be prepared to enjoy, with the highest relish, the pleasures of that world, where peace and love will reign and triumph for ever.

“ Let no man, then seek his own,
“ but every man another’s wealth.”
In the relations of domestic life, pursue the peace and happiness of those with whom you are connected, no less than your own. By a diligent attention to the interests of your family; by a peaceable, kind and affectionate behaviour; and by a careful performance of all relative duties; strengthen that union which nature hath established, and secure and perpetuate those pleasures which domestic life is capable of affording. In your intercourse with the world, let your concern for the interests of others preserve you from all mean and iniquitous
prac-

practices, and prompt you to the strictest fidelity and honour in your dealings. Always indulge the natural feelings of humanity towards the distressed of your fellow-creatures; and be ever ready to exert yourselves for their relief. Cherish a generous concern for the welfare of your country, and manifest a public spirit, by cheerfully contributing all in your power towards the public good. To conclude; extend your good wishes to all mankind, and embrace the whole family of God, upon the face of the earth, in the arms of a cordial and disinterested benevolence. In this manner, act agreeably to the nature which God hath given you, and the situation in which he hath placed you; secure to yourselves the pleasures and honours of virtue; imitate the great Father of your spirits; support the dignity of your christian

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character ; and prepare yourselves for
a blessed immortality :

Which that we may all obtain, may
God of his infinite mercy grant !

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

THE FATAL EFFECTS OF IRREGULAR PASSIONS ILLUSTRATED
IN THE HISTORY OF *CAIN* AND *ABEL*.

*Ira furor brevis est. Animum rege, qui nisi paret
Imperat; hunc frænis, hunc tu compesce catena.*

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S E R M O N III.

GENESIS, iv. 4, 5.

*And the Lord had respect unto Abel,
and to his offering; but unto Cain,
and to his offering he had not respect.*

“ **W** Herewith shall I come before
“ the Lord? and how shall I
“ bow myself before the most high
“ God?” is an enquiry of the utmost
moment; an enquiry to which every
man, who is duly sensible of the im-
portance of religious worship, and sin-
cerely desirous of the divine approba-
tion and acceptance, must earnestly
wish for a satisfactory answer.

That

That veneration, gratitude and subjection are due to the greatest and best of all Beings ; and that these sentiments ought to be expressed in solemn acts of devotion, is universally allowed. As mankind have differed in nothing more, than in their religious forms and ceremonies ; so there is, nothing in which they have been more generally agreed, than in acknowledging the existence of a Supreme Being, and the reasonableness of paying him some kind of religious homage. Now, since this is a duty which is founded upon the first principles of reason, and upon the relation which subsists between man and his Creator ; every one, who hath the fear of God before his eyes, must be desirous of performing it in a becoming and acceptable manner.

On this interesting subject, the story with which the text is connected gives us the fullest satisfaction. It teach-

teacheth us, that the principal thing, which the Almighty regards in his worshippers, is—not the value or excellence of the offering ; not the magnificence or parade with which it is presented ; not the outward circumstances, or appearance of the offerer ; but the inward dispositions of his heart, and the general tenor of his conduct in life.

We have here two persons who, as far as appears from the story, were in every respect, excepting their moral characters, upon a perfect equality. They had both been alike instructed in the principles of religion, and trained up from their youth in the knowledge of God, and in a regard to the external duties of religion. They were both employed in natural and useful occupations: *Abel* was a keeper of sheep, and *Cain* was a tiller of the ground. Each of them brought an offering to the Lord, according

according to his respective employment and possessions. "*Cain* brought of the fruit of the ground ; and *Abel* he also brought the firstlings of the flock, and of the fat thereof." Nevertheless, " the Lord had respect unto *Abel* and to his offering ; but unto *Cain* and to his offering he had not respect."

Perhaps, to a human spectator, the offering of *Cain*, and that of *Abel* might appear alike good. But they appeared not so, in the eyes of that Being, who " seeth not as man seeth." He refused the one, and accepted the other—not from caprice and arbitrary pleasure—this is not the manner of the wise and merciful Governor of the world—he had good reason for the distinction which he made with respect to their offerings ; for his all-discerning eye observed an essential difference in their characters. He saw
that

that *Cain*, notwithstanding all his professions of piety, was, in the dispositions of his heart, and the course of his life, a bad man. He could not approve of his character, and therefore he had no respect unto his offering. He saw that *Abel* was in reality, what he professed to be, a good man; he beheld his uprightness and integrity with approbation; and therefore it was that his sacrifice was well pleasing in his sight.

In this manner it is that the Almighty judgeth concerning the worship, which is presented unto him, by every reasonable creature upon the face of the earth. He is himself perfectly righteous and good. He knows that nothing, but the practice of righteousness, can produce the perfection and happiness of human nature. He therefore requires a virtuous temper and character, as the condition, without
—which

which no religious services, with whatever regularity or solemnity they are performed, can possibly be acceptable to him. Come before him with all the pomp of costly oblations; present your devotions in magnificent and solemn temples dedicated to his honour; express the most rational sentiments of piety in the most proper and decent language; assume the utmost seriousness and sanctity in your external behaviour, during the seasons of devotion; notwithstanding all this, “if you regard iniquity in your heart, “the Lord will not hear you.” But offer unto your Maker the living sacrifice of a pure heart and a good life; let the worship you pay to him be accompanied with righteousness and mercy to your fellow-creatures; and whatever else may be wanting in your religious services, you may assure yourselves that they will meet with a gracious reception. “In every nation,

“tion,

“ tion, he that feareth God and work-
 “ eth righteousness is accepted of
 “ him.”

Be not deceived by the vain imagination (an imagination by which thousands have been deluded to their undoing) that frequent exercises of devotion, and a strict profession of religion, may be substituted in the room of a good life, and will hide a multitude of sins. To suppose that the outward forms of piety will be accepted by the Almighty, in the room of those good dispositions and that virtuous character, which give to religious exercises all their value; what can be more inconsistent with the obvious dictates of reason, and the express language of scripture? Observe the manner in which the prophet *Isaiab* addresses the degenerate children of *Israel*, in the name of the Lord: “ To what purpose is the mul-
 “ titude

“ titude of your sacrifices unto me
“ faith the Lord? When ye come to
“ appear before me, who hath re-
“ quired this at your hands, to tread
“ my courts? Wash ye; make you
“ clean; put away the evil of your
“ doings from before mine eyes; cease
“ to do evil; learn to do well.”

Consider well the import of this solemn address; and learn to place no confidence in an external profession of religion, while your devotions produce not the fruits of righteousness. Be not deceived: God is not to be mocked: his eye sees through every fair disguise: and, whatever soothing artifices men may at present practise upon themselves, he will at last render unto every man according to his works.

Cain had doubtless been too well instructed in the principles of religion,
not

not to know, that the prayer of the upright and good man alone is acceptable to God. One might therefore have expected, that the consciousness of his own guilt would have filled him with shame, and covered his face with confusion, in the presence of his Maker; and would have led him to acknowledge, with penitence, the equity of the divine conduct towards him. One might have expected, that, when his offering met with an unfavourable reception, his conscience would have immediately suggested the reason, and prompted him to prepare himself for presenting a more acceptable sacrifice, by repentance and reformation. But, see the deceitfulness of sin! No sooner did *Cain* perceive that his offering was rejected, and that of his brother accepted, than “he was very wroth, “and his countenance fell.”

Had he been angry with *himself*, for his wickedness and hypocrify; had his countenance fallen in shame and remorse, like the Publican, in our Saviour's parable, who could not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; it had been well. But the case was far otherwise. He was angry with his *Maker*; and, in the vanity of his heart, imagined that his offering had deserved a better reception. Though he was conscious of his crimes, he thought it hard and unjust, that he should suffer the punishment due to them. Thus doth "the foolishness of man" "pervert his way;" and, when the day of visitation cometh, "his heart" "fretteth against the Lord."

Cain was angry too with his *brother*. For what reason? His brother had done him no wrong. It was not his fault, that the Lord had rejected his offering. As became a virtuous and affectionate

affectionate brother, his heart had doubtless often melted with compassion and grief, for the follies and vices of *Cain*. And, when he saw that the Lord had no respect unto his brother's offering, he perhaps with tears lamented his disappointment and shame. Wherefore then was *Cain* thus wroth with his brother? and wherefore did his countenance fall? The true reason, in this case (as perhaps it is in most other cases of a like nature, in which the virtuous and good meet with malicious and cruel treatment from the wicked) was this; "his own works were evil and his brother's righteous." He could not bear to see himself so much outshone by a brother, over whom nature had given him the superiority of birth-right. He could not endure the sight of the man, whose virtues placed his own character in so contemptible a light. He could not brook the reproaches and censures, which he

must expect to meet with from every quarter, after this public and solemn manifestation of his brother's piety, and his own wickedness. He could not bear to think, that *Abel's* offering was accepted, and his own rejected. His breast was fired with resentment: fullness and rancour darkened his countenance.

Every angry, every discontented, every envious look or thought, is observed by the great Searcher of hearts and Judge of men. The Lord saw the hateful passions which agitated the breast of *Cain*; and, being “full of
“forbearance and long-suffering, not
“willing that any should perish, but
“that all should come to repentance,” to convince him of the folly of his resentment, and to prevent the fatal consequences which it might occasion, he condescended to reason with him.
“The Lord said unto *Cain*, Why art
“thou

“ thou wroth, and why is thy coun-
 “ tenance fallen? If thou doest
 “ well, shalt thou not be accepted?
 “ and if thou doest not well, sin lieth
 “ at the door; and unto thee shall be
 “ his desire, and thou shalt rule over
 “ him.” He was hereby plainly in-
 structed, that he had been treated
 with the utmost impartiality and equi-
 ty, and therefore had no reason to be
 dissatisfied with the divine proceedings
 towards him; that if his behaviour
 had been upright and virtuous, he
 might have been assured of the favour
 of that Being, who hateth nothing
 that he hath made, with whom is no
 respect of persons, and who is the
 Friend and Rewarder of the righte-
 ous: but, that, since he chose to for-
 sake the paths of innocence and vir-
 tue, and transgress the laws of God,
 he ought not to think it hard,
 that he should meet with that
 disapprobation, with which the Al-
 E 2 mighty

mighty must always behold the workers of iniquity. He was likewise taught, that he had no reason to be displeased with *Abel*, and assured, that the difference in their characters should not deprive him of the privileges of his birth-right.

These arguments ought doubtless to have convinced *Cain* of the reasonableness of his punishment; to have calmed his resentment; to have reconciled him to the conduct of his Maker; and to have disposed him to be at peace with his brother. But when the mind is agitated by the turbulent passions of anger, envy, hatred, and revenge, it is ill prepared to listen to the gentle voice of reason or religion. At such a season, no arguments can convince, no persuasions prevail: even the Almighty himself speaketh in vain.

Cain

Cain still continued to envy and to hate his brother. Though perhaps he might recover the composure of his countenance, the most malignant passions still rankled in his heart. Every day gave them new strength; and they only waited for a favourable opportunity, to burst forth in some dreadful act of rage and cruelty. Such an opportunity at length occurred. *Cain* and *Abel* were alone in the field. At this instant, he called to mind the dishonour and disappointment which his brother's virtues had brought upon him:—for so his vitiated fancy represented the matter; though his own vices had been the real cause of both. He could no longer bear the sight of one, who continually reminded him of his demerit and disgrace. He felt the hateful spirit of malice working within him. His heart meditated instant revenge. Rage and fury boiled in his blood; flashed through his eyes;

distorted his features; nerved his arm with double strength. Without allowing himself a moment's reflection; without giving his brother a moment's warning; he lifted up his hand against *Abel*, and slew him.

O my brethren! into what depths of wickedness and inhumanity are men in danger of falling, when they give themselves up to the impulse of the impetuous and detestable passions of envy and malice! When once these passions usurp the dominion in the soul, then farewell all sense of honour and love of virtue! farewell all regard to the sacred laws of equity! farewell to the tender ties of friend and brother! farewell to all the fond affections and sweet endearments of humanity! Little did *Cain* imagine, when he gave way to the first emotions of envy and resentment, that they would have led him to commit the crime, at which
nature

nature reluctates, and which, more than all other crimes, chills the soul with horror: little did he think, that they would have made him a murderer. Had he foreseen, that his passions would have at last risen to such an height, as to prompt him to lay violent hands upon his brother, whom he ought to have loved; upon his younger brother, whom he ought to have protected; upon his virtuous and pious brother, whom the God of heaven approved; with what care would he have extinguished the flame at its first appearance! with what attention and thankfulness would he have received the divine admonition!

From his unhappy error, and dreadful fate; from the unhappy error and dreadful fate of thousands, who have, like him, abandoned themselves to the dominion of their vicious passions, let us, my brethren, learn wisdom. When

we first indulge ourselves in resentment, envy, or malice, we keep it within our own bosoms ; or only suffer it to break forth in the language of ill-nature, fretfulness, and spleen. But we know not, to what height the storm which our own folly hath created may arise, or what havock it may make. Probably it may destroy our neighbour's reputation in the world : perhaps it may disturb his peace and happiness ; possibly it may involve him in distress and wretchedness, and overwhelm him with inevitable destruction. " We cannot tell how great
" a fire a little spark may kindle :"
for " a man that hath no rule over his
" own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."
Let us then check every boisterous and destructive passion at its first appearance, and, according to the advice of *Solomon*, " leave off contention
" before it be meddled with."

The

The consequences of indulging the passions of anger, envy, and hatred are dreadful indeed! *Cain* found them to be so. When he was first called to account concerning his brother, he hoped to have concealed his crime by a falsehood. But no crime can ever be concealed by falsehood from the eye of omniscience. When the Lord said unto *Cain*, "Where is *Abel* thy brother?" he said, "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" But neither this peremptory denial, nor the effrontery with which he charged his judge with asking him a question which he was not bound to answer, could hide his guilt, or save him from the dreadful sentence of condemnation. The Lord said, "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground: And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

“ hand, When thou tillest the ground
“ it shall not henceforth yield unto
“ thee her strength : a fugitive and a
“ vagabond shalt thou be in the
“ earth.” Under this awful, but
righteous sentence, the heart of *Cain*
sunk in despair; and he cried out,
“ My punishment is greater than I
“ can bear.”

And all those, who indulge themselves in anger, envy, hatred, revenge and malice, or other irregular and pernicious passions, are liable to a like condemnation. Their punishment is as certain, and as dreadful, as if they were to receive their doom by a voice from heaven. In the present life, their turbulent passions will expose them to the resentment and hatred of the world; and their guilty consciences will fill them with perpetual remorse, alarm, and terror. And in the life to come, the holy scriptures instruct us,
that

that they will receive the natural consequence, and the just recompense of their restless and tormenting passions, and will suffer punishments which may not improperly be compared to a worm which dieth not, and to a fire which shall never be quenched.

That we may all be so effectually warned of the fatal consequences of ungoverned passions, by the unhappy example which hath now been exhibited before us, as at last to escape this condemnation, may God of his great mercy grant ! Amen.

THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

BY [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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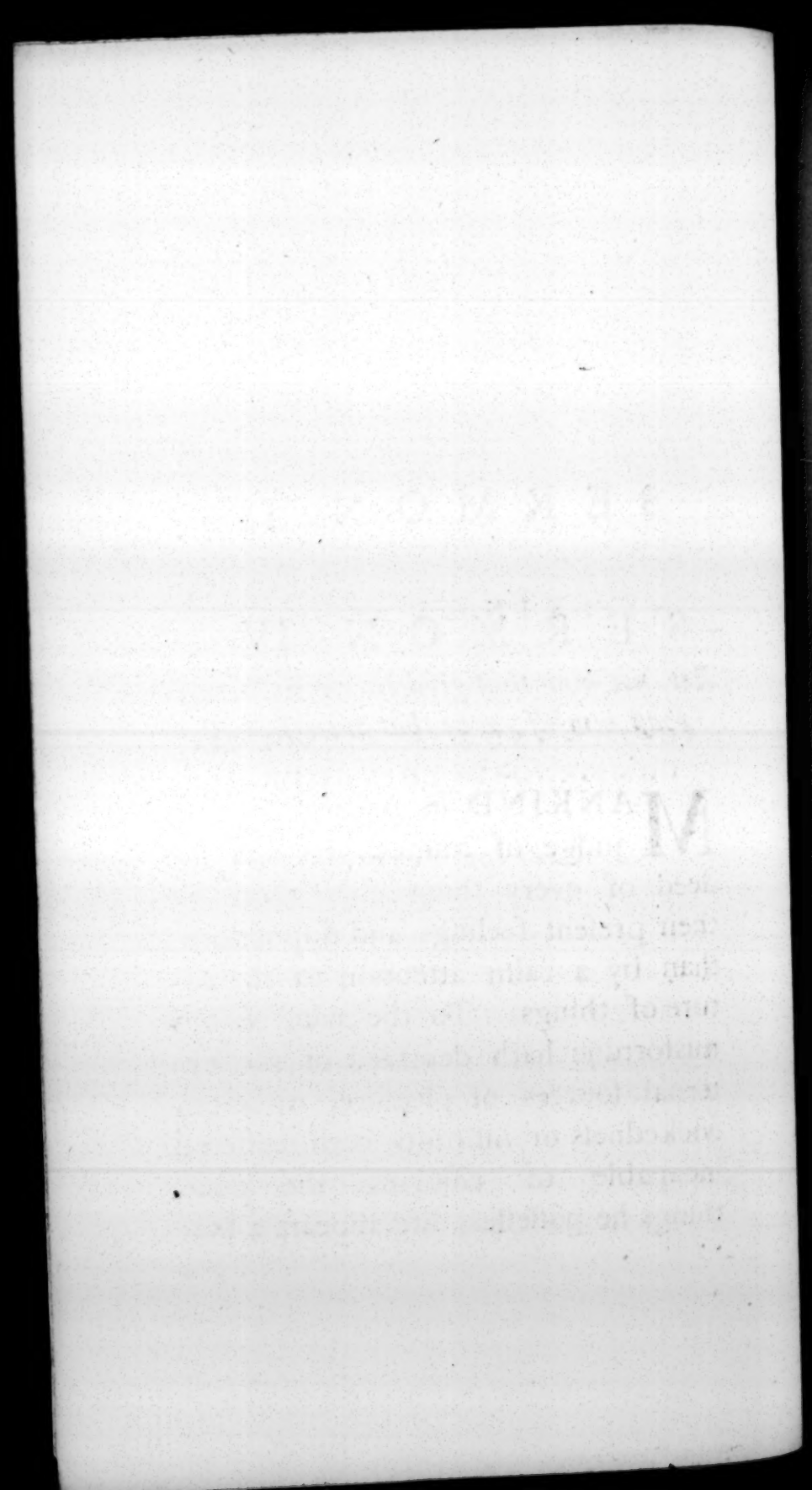
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S E R M O N IV.

CAUTION AND DIFFIDENCE RE-
COMMENDED TO YOUTH.

CAVENDO TUTUS.



S E R M O N IV.

I K I N G S XX. 11.

*Let not him that girdeth on his harness
boast himself, as he that putteth it off.*

MANKIND in general seem to judge of human life, and indeed of every thing else, more by their present feelings and dispositions, than by a calm attention to the nature of things. To the man, whom misfortune hath deprived of the external sources of pleasure, or whom wickedness or infirmity hath rendered incapable of enjoying the good things he possesses, life appears a barren

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ren and dreary wilderness, and the whole face of nature seems overspread with a settled gloom. While the man, whose natural temper is contented and chearful, who enjoys the blessing of uninterrupted health, and who is successful in his enterprizes and happy in his connections, feels a constant gaiety of heart, which enlivens every scene around him; and imagines himself placed in the midst of a flowery and fruitful paradise, where the thorns of sorrow will never spring up to perplex his path, and under a serene and bright horizon, which will never be overcast with the clouds of adversity.

There is no instance, in which this prejudiced and partial judgment of things is more visible, than in the sanguine expectations which young persons usually form, concerning their condition and character in future life. Having had little experience of the
under-

uncertainty which attends all human pursuits, they promise themselves great success in their attempts to acquire the gifts of fortune ; and hope that the industry of a few years will be rewarded with all the blessings of affluence and independence, or at least with a comfortable and decent competency. Conscious of the benevolence and generosity of their own dispositions, and unacquainted with the disguises which are assumed, and the artifices which are practised, in the world ; their hearts are warmed with the idea of disinterested affection, and they expect to find, in every gay companion, or sage adviser, a sincere and faithful friend. Having never measured the extent of their abilities, they flatter themselves that they are capable of making improvements and executing designs, which shall surprise the world, and crown them with immortal honour. Having never
tried

tried the strength of their moral powers, or observed the snares which beset the path of unsuspecting innocence, they presume, that they shall find it no difficult task to preserve their integrity inviolate, and their reputation unblemished, and to persevere in a course of uncorrupted and distinguished virtue, to the end of their lives.

But, "let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself, as he that putteth it off."

Considering this proverbial maxim, as an admonition, which may be properly addressed to young persons, to guard them against that confidence and presumption, to which they are peculiarly liable; I shall, in this discourse, endeavour to convince you, my young friends, of the great importance and necessity of diffidence and

and caution, in your entrance upon the world, by pointing out the dangers to which your virtue and your happiness are exposed: after which I shall attempt to shew you, by what means they may be most effectually secured and established.

Do not flatter yourselves with the expectation of passing your days in uninterrupted tranquility and pleasure; or imagine that you shall be exempted from the common evils and calamities of human life.

Because you are at present blessed with a robust and healthful constitution, and are capable of enjoying with delight, and even with rapture, the scenes of amusement and indulgence, which solicit your attention on every side; infer not from hence, that the objects around you will always continue to wear this gay and attractive

tive aspect, or that you will always be thus able to relish the delights which they are adapted to afford. Remember, that all animal pleasures are unstable and precarious, and depend upon circumstances which it is not in your power to command; that you are liable every hour of your lives to be seized with disorders, which would entirely destroy your appetite for these pleasures; under which the richest and most luxurious entertainments, the fairest objects in nature, or the most enchanting melody of sounds would be insipid, tiresome, offensive: and that even if you should meet with no interruption in your pursuit of pleasure from external causes, the seeds of satiety and disappointment are sown in the very frame of your natures, and in a short time, (much shorter than you may be willing to imagine) those objects which now captivate your whole attention, will lose all their charms, and be no longer

longer able to give you delight or entertainment.

You are perhaps entering upon the world with all the advantages of a liberal education, an easy fortune, agreeable connections, a fair character, and an honourable and advantageous employment. With these favourable circumstances you may possibly think, that your prospect of success and happiness in future life amounts to little less than an absolute certainty: you begin your career with a confident assurance that you shall obtain the prize: you promise yourselves, that “to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” But, consider, I beseech you, on what a precarious foundation your towering hopes are built, and how soon they may all be levelled with the ground. Suppose the friends in whom you confide should, from some real or imaginary

ginary provocation, desert your interests, and employ that influence against you, which you expected them to exert in your favour: suppose that some designing villain should have art and malice enough to rob you of your good name, or should by some fraudulent device deprive you of the possessions which you hoped to make the basis of your future fortune: suppose that in the course of business you should take one imprudent or injudicious step, at a season, and in an affair, of critical importance, and thus involve yourselves in inextricable difficulties: or lastly, suppose that it should please the wise **Disposer of all things**, to suffer some calamitous accident at once to frustrate all your schemes, blast all your hopes, and overwhelm you with disappointment and misery: suppose any one of these cases to happen (and any of them may happen to the wisest and best of men) where
then

then would be all your flattering hopes of wealth, your airy dreams of greatness? Do we not often, in fact, see those who, at their first entrance on life, were surrounded with every advantage which could promise success, meeting with a series of misfortunes which depress their rising hopes, and at last sink them down under the united burden of disappointment and poverty?

Learn then to moderate your expectations, with regard to the portion of external good which awaits you in future life. Entertain no extravagant ideas of the happiness which this world is capable of affording; and you will be the better disposed to enjoy that share of it which divine providence shall bestow upon you. Expect your part of those calamities, which are the common lot of mortality, and you will be the better prepared

pared to endure them with fortitude, whenever they shall arrive.

And at the same time that I exhort you not to be sanguine in your hopes of happiness in this life, suffer me likewise to caution you against presuming too far upon the strength of your virtuous principles, and imagining that your innocence and integrity are secure beyond all danger of violation.

You have perhaps enjoyed the advantages of a virtuous education. From your earliest years, you have received strong impressions in favour of religion, from the wise instructions, and good examples of your parents and friends. With your infant breath you imbibed a sense of honour, a love of virtue, and a reverence for the Almighty. And these principles have been continually gaining strength,

as

as you have advanced in years and experience. You may therefore perhaps imagine, that there is little danger, that you will ever be tempted to deviate from the path of innocence, and to follow a multitude to do evil. You may perhaps imagine, that it cannot be in the power of any temptation whatever, to shake your resolution, and betray you into irregular and vicious practices. But remember the advice of the wise son of *Sirach*, "Be not confident in a plain way." The path of virtue is plain and easy; it is the path of pleasantness and peace; but it is beset with snares, of which you should be warned, and in the midst of which you must walk circumspectly, if you would be secure from falling. It is only by "pondering the path of your feet," that "all your ways can be established."

That you may be fully sensible of the necessity of circumspection and diffidence, suffer me particularly to remind you of some of the principal dangers to which your virtue is exposed.

And first, you have appetites and passions implanted in your nature, which, if left without controul, would lead you into irregular and vicious indulgences. It is true, the animal as well as the rational part of our nature is of divine original, and as such cannot be supposed to have any thing in it defective or corrupt. It is no less true, that these appetites, being the gift of our wise and merciful Creator, are designed to be a source of enjoyment, and ought, under certain restrictions, to be gratified. But it is likewise true, that they are capable of being abused and perverted, in such a manner as to involve us in vice and misery; and
that

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that it is only while they are regulated by the superior principles of reason and conscience, that they can be productive of real happiness. The world affords many melancholy facts, to prove the fatal effects of indulging irregular and unlawful desires. The youngest amongst us, who are capable of observation and reflection, must have seen instances of persons, whose health has been impaired, whose fortunes have been wasted, whose reputation hath been blasted, and whose peace of mind hath been destroyed, by following pleasures into the haunts of licentiousness and excess. Perhaps there are few young persons, who have not, at some season, been convinced from their own experience of the hazard, to which our virtue is exposed by the inferior appetites and passions of our nature.

But this is not your only danger. There are many external circumstances which concur with your internal constitution, to tempt you to transgress the laws of sobriety and virtue. Numerous are the examples of vicious indulgence, which attract your notice, and solicit your imitation, on every side. And of these there are not a few, whose vices are blended with so many amiable accomplishments, that there is great danger, lest, while you pay the respect which is due to the latter, a prejudice in favour of the former should unawares steal into your hearts. While you admire the agreeable companion, and love the kind and faithful friend; it will require no small degree of attention and care, not to mistake his foibles for excellencies, and his vices for virtues. And when vicious examples are thus recommended, and thus disguised, what can be expected but that
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the youthful mind, which is in all cases so powerfully governed by the principle of imitation, will be totally captivated and enslaved?

No inconsiderable degree of hazard likewise arises from that chearfulness of temper, and gaiety of heart, which in itself, is not only innocent, but highly ornamental and agreeable. It is in the season of unreserved and unrestrained conversation, in the social hour, when calm reflection and sober wisdom give place to mirth and festivity, that youthful virtue is most unguarded, and most frequently betrayed. I presume not to censure, I wish not to discourage, that propensity to social intercourse, which is so natural to youth, and which is the source of so many innocent and rational pleasures. I am not insensible, that friendly society, and chearful converse are the highest cordials of life. But it is ne-

cessary that you should be warned of the snares which lie concealed in this flowery path; snares in which many a heedless passenger hath been caught, to his utter disgrace and ruin. The boundaries between harmless gaiety and licentious pleasure are so faintly marked, that it is no wonder if, at seasons when we are more agreeably employed than in taking heed to our goings, we sometimes pass over from the one to the other before we are aware.

Your virtue is farther exposed to danger from a quarter, from which one is loth to suppose that any thing evil can come, from that plianeness of disposition and desire of obliging, which in young persons is peculiarly amiable and pleasing. Perhaps it has been through the influence of this disposition, mixed with a small share of vanity, that most of those
young

young persons, who have given themselves up to vicious pleasures, have been at first tempted to trespass the bounds of innocence. There is something in vice, against which the heart of man, in its uncorrupted state, strongly reluctates; and there are few young persons so totally devoid of moral feelings, as to be able, at first, to commit a bad action, merely for the sake of the pleasure which attends it. But false shame; an excess of good-nature; a fear of giving offence, incurring ridicule, or being thought singular; and an ambition of being applauded as a youth of spirit and an agreeable companion, have often corrupted those hearts, which the charms of vicious pleasure alone, without these aids, could never have allured. The maxim of *Solomon* is founded in nature, and confirmed by experience, That “the fear of man bringeth a snare.”

But if licentious pleasure, with all its native attractions, and all its adventitious supports, should be unable to seduce you, still your virtue is far from being secure. The world has other temptations in store for you; which it will require the exertion of all your wisdom and fortitude to resist. Wealth, the idol at whose shrine such multitudes bow, will use a thousand arts, to place you among the number of her votaries. She will endeavour to convince you that ease and indulgence, pleasure and happiness, respect and honour, are at her disposal; and 'tis well if she do not at last persuade you to seek the rewards she promises, at the expence of your integrity, your peace of mind, and your hope of immortality. Ambition too will strongly tempt you, to pursue the delusive phantoms, which she raises before your imagination, through all the mazes of injustice, oppression,

pression, flattery, dissimulation and corruption. By the false lustre which these objects assume, thousands have been deluded. In search after the happiness which they promise, thousands have relinquished all the noble pursuits, and resigned all the substantial pleasures, of wisdom and virtue. Imagine not, then, that you are invincibly armed against the assaults of these subtle and powerful adversaries: flatter not yourselves, that your danger is past before you begin the combat, or that you shall obtain a cheap and easy conquest. "Let not him
 " that girdeth on the harness, boast
 " himself, as he that putteth it off."

Such are the difficulties, such the dangers to which you are exposed; which you must expect to meet with in your passage through life. Judge ye, whether ye have any room for confidence and presumption; whether

ther your situation doth not require all the caution and circumspection which you can command.

It is not, however, the design of what hath been said, to fill you with gloomy ideas of human life; to dishearten you in the pursuit of happiness or the practice of virtue; or to incline you to sit down in indolence and despair. Though you are liable to disappointments and calamities, you may reasonably hope for a considerable share of felicity, in this world. Though your virtue is exposed to many trials; though temptations surround you on every side; it is still in your power (with the assistance and blessing of Almighty God) to hold fast your integrity, and continue steadfast and immoveable in the practice of your duty. Be not then discouraged by difficulties, or terrified by dangers. Be cautious and diffident;

dent; but be not timid or desponding. In circumspection lies your safety; on diligence and resolution depend your improvement and happiness. Let me therefore recommend to your attentive consideration, and practical regard, the following hints of advice respecting your external condition, and the security and improvement of your virtue.

If you be desirous of escaping the calamities incident to human nature, and of spending your days in ease and prosperity; let it be your first care to be regular and discreet in the government of yourselves, and to be upright and honest in your transactions with others. Temperance is the best security against pain and disease; and honesty is the most direct and certain road to reputation and wealth. These are truths, in which all wise men of every age have been agreed; which.

which are confirmed by the universal experience of mankind. "Take good heed then to yourselves, that ye be temperate in all things;" and in all the concerns of life, "walk uprightly, and follow after righteousness."

Farther to secure your prosperity in the world, apply yourselves diligently to the business of your station; for "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Adhere steadily to the employment in which you are engaged; remembering the advice of the wise man; "My son, meddle not with many matters." Carefully observe, and diligently improve every opportunity which occurs of improving your possessions by lawful means; for an opportunity once lost may possibly never return. Let frugality and prudence preserve what industry hath gained; and be not tempted to waste your substance in extravagance and folly,

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folly, by the ridiculous vanity of making an appearance equal to that of persons, who are your superiors in station and fortune. "Take not pleasure in much good cheer, neither be tied to the expence thereof." Lastly, set a proper value upon your reputation, and endeavour, by maintaining a steady integrity, and by a generous, friendly and obliging behaviour, to gain the esteem and good will of all around you.

These maxims of virtue and prudence, carefully observed, will do much more to ensure your success and happiness in the world, than all the arts of hypocrisy, and all the deceptions of unrighteousness. They will place you in the way of ease and prosperity, and give you the fairest prospect of spending your days in the midst of abundance, and your years in a succession of pleasures. But, after

ter all, this is more than even virtue and prudence, with their united influence, can absolutely promise.

To prepare you therefore for that reverse of fortune, from which the wisest and best of men are not secure; let me advise you, to form just sentiments of the real excellence and happiness of human nature; to establish in your minds a practical conviction, that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;” and to lay a foundation for peace and comfort in all the vicissitudes of human life, by the study of wisdom, and the practice of virtue. It is the observation of an eminent writer (*a*) (an observation which may be instructive to all, but particularly deserves the attention of youth) “That our being miserable, or not miserable, when we fall into

a Lord Bolingbroke.

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“ misfortunes, depends upon the man-
 “ ner in which we have enjoyed prof-
 “ perity.”

That you may be successful in your endeavours to preserve your innocence, and improve your virtue; establish and strengthen in your minds the fundamental principles of morality and religion; frequently call to mind the clear evidence on which they are founded, and endeavour, by every means in your power, to impress them more deeply upon your hearts. With this view perform the duties of devotion both public and private, and attend upon religious institutions, with regularity and seriousness.

Cultivate, with the utmost care, a lively sense of moral good and evil; studiously avoid whatever would tend to destroy or diminish your moral sensibility,

sibility, or efface the good effects of a virtuous education; and esteem a tender conscience—not your shame—but your security, ornament, and glory.

Make yourselves well acquainted with your own abilities, dispositions and inclinations; that you may undertake nothing to which you are unequal; that you may encounter no temptation, where you have little prospect of gaining the victory. It is for want of that self-knowledge, which can only be acquired by self-inspection, that we so frequently see young persons venture into scenes, where all their good principles and resolutions fail them; and where they learn, by fatal experience, that “he
“ that trusteth his own heart is a
“ fool.”

Be always ready to hearken to the lessons of wisdom, and the counsels of friend-

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friendship. Forget not the maxim of *Solomon*, "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wife; but he that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul." Thankfully embrace every opportunity of availing yourselves of the knowledge and experience of others. "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not."

Be cautious and prudent in the choice of your intimate companions and friends. Let it be an invariable maxim with you, to admit none to your heart, but such as are virtuous and good; for "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed."

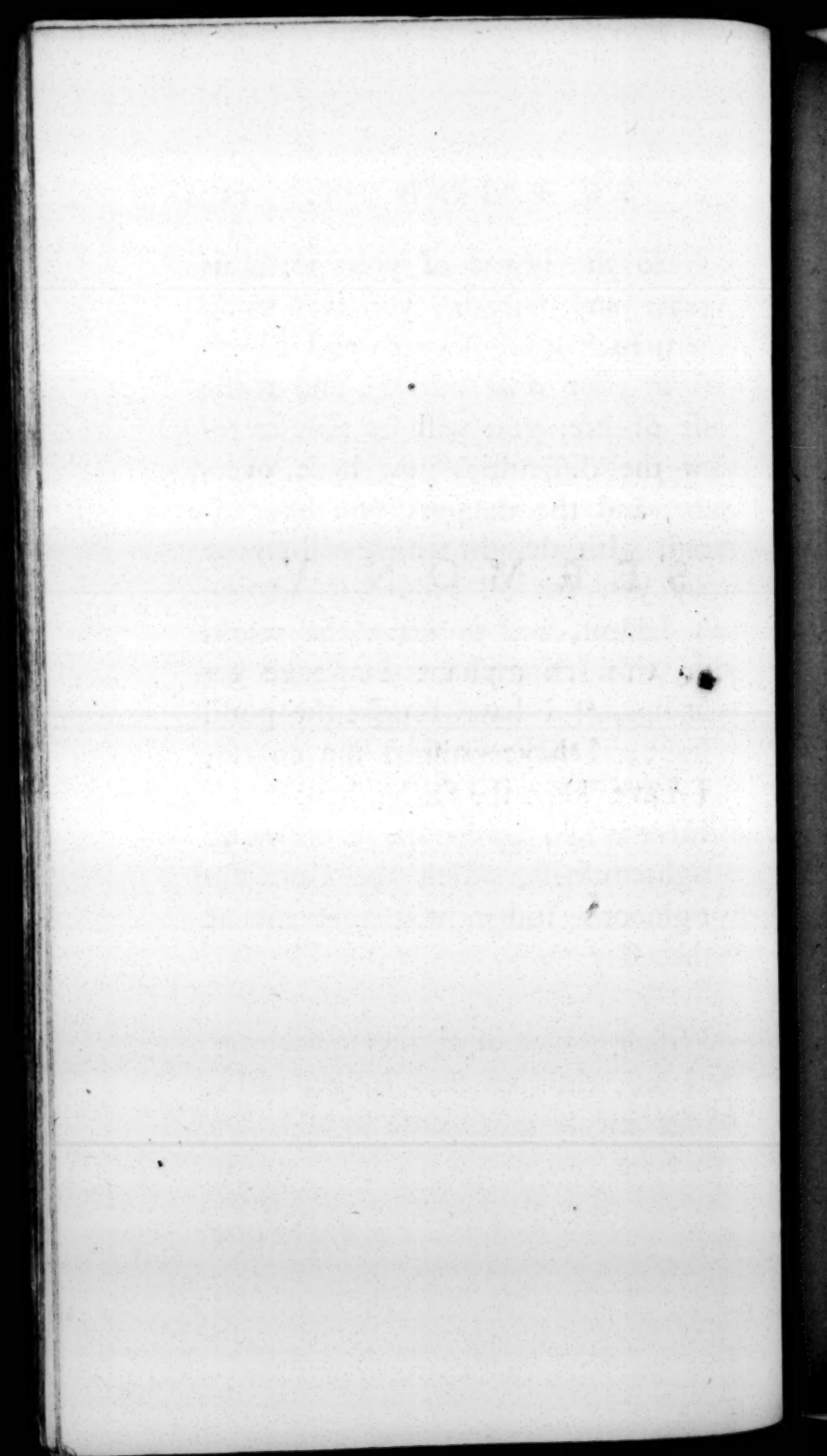
In the last place, often retire from the world, to call to mind your past ways; to deliberate concerning your future conduct; and to seek direction
and

and assistance from the Eternal Fountain of wisdom. Such seasons of reflection as these are peculiarly requisite in the time of youth, when passions are violent, and experience small. It is only in solitude, and by frequent meditation, that we can learn the art of living well. Often, then, retire from the world to commune with your own hearts, and to hold converse with that Being, who is best able to be the guide of your youth; and who, if you fear him and obey his commands, will be your guardian through life, your support in death, and your portion for ever.

Carefully observe these rules, and you may assure yourselves of that share of present good which shall, on the whole, be best for you; you will preserve your virtue uncorrupted in the midst of all the snares of vice; you will minister unspeakable satisfaction

tion to the hearts of your virtuous parents and friends; you will enjoy a perpetual fund of peace and happiness in your own minds; and at the close of life, you will be able to review the difficulties you have overcome, and the dangers you have escaped, with delight which will amply repay you for all your past anxiety and labour, and to leave the world with this triumphant language on your lips, “ I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; “ I have kept the faith; henceforth “ there is laid up for me a crown of “ righteousness, which the Lord the “ righteous Judge, will give me at “ that day.”

Which crown of righteousness may the Lord, the righteous Judge, of his infinite mercy grant unto us all!



S E R M O N V.

AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

*Multa petentibus
Desunt multa. Bene est cui Deus obtulit
Parcâ, quod satis, manu.*

HOR.

S E R M O N V.

L U K E xii. 15.

Take heed and beware of covetousness.

THERE is no vice which more easily insinuates itself into the heart of man, or with respect to which men are more apt to deceive and flatter themselves, than that against which our Saviour here cautions his disciples. Those who are so far under its influence, as to live in a state of perpetual slavery, nevertheless, generally find means to persuade themselves, that avarice makes no part of their characters.

ters. It is true, they are industrious in providing a decent competency for themselves and their families; they are frugal in their expences, and careful not to waste their substance either upon themselves or others; they know the value of wealth, and choose, as far as diligence and œconomy will enable them, to lay up something in store against a time of need. But they apprehend there is nothing in their conduct which the wise and prudent part of mankind can disapprove; and as for the thoughtless and extravagant, who offer up all that they possess at the shrine of luxury or ambition, and spare no cost or pains to be thought hospitable, generous, and charitable, they despise their censures, and thank God that they are not capable of such imprudence and folly. They are sensible of no material defects in their characters, and highly value themselves on account of their industry,

industry, prudence, sobriety, and religion; while perhaps, their hearts are hardened against every impression of humanity and compassion; they can see a brother in need, without feeling a wish to relieve him; and can practise all the arts of injustice and fraud, and be guilty of all the cruelties of extortion and oppression without remorse. It is therefore highly necessary, that we should be frequently reminded of the immorality and pernicious tendency of an avaricious temper, and exhorted to “take heed” and beware of covetousness.”

The first enquiry, on this subject, will naturally be, Wherein doth the vice of covetousness consist? In answer to which, I beg leave to lay before you the following View of the character of a COVETOUS MAN.

The desire of wealth is the ruling passion of his heart. In the pursuit of it all his thoughts, hopes, and wishes centre. If he can accomplish his favourite schemes of gain, and spend his days in the midst of plenty, his highest ambition is gratified. To attain this end, he will neglect the cultivation of his understanding; relinquish all the pleasures of knowledge, virtue, and religion; and even resign his hopes of immortality. He is determined, at all adventures to be rich. His maxim is; Get wealth, honestly if you can; however, by all means, - get wealth. If the plain and beaten paths of honesty and diligence will conduct him to his end, it is well; but if he find these unsuccessful, he will not scruple to turn aside into the labyrinths of fraud and iniquity. Rather than fall short of the mark at which he aims, he will sacrifice all the tender feelings of humanity;

nity ; break through the sacred enclosures of honour and truth, and involve himself in repeated and complicated guilt. While his schemes of gain are unaccomplished, his mind is agitated with a thousand impatient wishes and anxious cares ; discontent and fretfulness lour upon his countenance ; and he beholds the plenty which his neighbour possesseth, with an envious eye. If at any time his desires are frustrated, and he meets with disappointments and losses, the burden is too heavy for him to bear ; he complains of the severity of his fate ; grows displeased with the world ; and is even tempted to arraign the ways of Providence. And when he hath met with the greatest success, and his affairs are in the most prosperous state, his insatiable spirit still thirsts after more. He never sits down contented with the portion of wealth, which hath fallen to his lot, and says,

I have enough ; but, after having made the largest acquisitions, he is still restless, impatient, dissatisfied. And what is the greatest paradox in his character is, that though he is perpetually wishing and longing for something which is yet unpossessed, he hath already much more, than he hath the wisdom or the heart to enjoy. His penurious and avaricious temper forbids him to taste those comforts and pleasures, which are placed within his reach ; and the utmost that can be expected from him is, that he should allow himself and his dependents, the necessary supports and some of the conveniencies of life. To make an appearance in the world suitable to his rank and fortune, would be, in his opinion, the height of extravagance and folly. And as for the pleasures of hospitality, beneficence, and charity—pleasures which give the highest value to riches—his heart is a stranger to them. He is incapable of understanding what this meaneth ;

meaneth, "It is more blessed to give
 "than to receive;" and hath no idea
 of "casting his bread upon the wa-
 "ters," in hopes of "finding it again.
 "after many days."

Such is the character of the co-
 vetous man. That we may be sensi-
 ble of the folly and guilt which at-
 tend it, and may be excited to pay
 a proper regard to the exhortation
 of the text, I shall, in the remainder
 of this discourse, endeavour to make
 it evident, that avarice is inconsistent
 with virtue, and destructive of hap-
 piness.

In the first place, Avarice is incon-
 sistent with virtue. It is an evident
 and important truth which our Savi-
 our hath taught us, That we cannot
 serve God and Mammon. The prin-
 ciples of religion and virtue, and the
 inordinate love of wealth, tend to

inspire men with dispositions, and lead them to actions, directly the reverse of each other. Religion teacheth us to be contented and thankful in every state, and to rejoice with them that rejoice. Avarice fills us with dissatisfaction and discontent in our own condition, and with envy at the prosperity of others. Religion requires us to acknowledge the providence of God in all the events of our lives, to ascribe all our enjoyments to his goodness, and chearfully to resign all our concerns to his direction. Avarice tends to divert our attention from the Fountain of all good, and lead us to place our confidence in uncertain riches, rather than in "the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Religion and virtue instruct us, that we should do unto others, as we would that they should do unto us, and that no man ought to live unto himself. Avarice requires

us to violate the sacred laws of equity and benevolence, and at the expence of our neighbour's interest and happiness, to seek our own profit. What can be more evident, than that it is impossible to serve two such opposite masters; that we must either "hate the one and love the other, or else hold to the one, and despise the other?"

The power of avarice over the minds of men, in all the relations and offices of social life, is worthy of particular notice.

In the transactions of business, covetousness will prompt a man to make use of unjust and dishonourable means to increase his possessions. It will suggest to him a thousand mean and fraudulent arts, by which he may impose upon the ignorance or credulity of others. It will have a strange power

to darken and confuse his ideas of right and wrong, and to render him incapable of judging aright, in the plainest cases of equity, where his own interest is concerned. Give him an opportunity of increasing his substance, by the use of the little contrivances of low cunning, or even by dishonest and iniquitous proceedings; and the prospect of gain will instantly cast such a mist before his eyes, that he will not be able to discern the meanness or injustice of his conduct, and will consider it as nothing more, than a wise and prudent management of his affairs. So much is he enamoured by the object of his pursuit, that he scarcely thinks any means unlawful, which can be made use of to obtain it. If, to satiate his thirst after wealth, the happiness of his fellow-creatures must be interrupted, their natural rights and liberties must be invaded, and the most valuable

able possessions must be taken from them by art or violence; still he can find means to persuade himself, that he hath only done that which is lawful and right.

Suppose the covetous man in whatever relations of life you please; you will still see him governed by the same selfish principles, and sordid views. Is he your friend? place not an unlimited confidence in his affection and esteem: expect not to find in him the generous feelings of the friendly heart; hope not to receive support and assistance from him in the day of adversity: for he is too closely wrapt up in himself, and his own little concerns, to be capable of the refined sentiments, and disinterested conduct, which are essential to true friendship. He may flatter and caress you in the time of your prosperity; but be assured that it is chiefly to serve his own

private ends ; and that, when he finds you can be no longer useful to him, he will no longer be your friend. Is he placed at the head of a family ? Parsimony appears in every part of his domestic œconomy. The luxury and extravagance of the age, the uncertainties of trade, and the necessity of providing against a future day, are made use of as excuses for denying himself and his family many of the common conveniences and pleasures of life. Instead of admitting hospitality to reside under his roof, he seldom suffers her to be so much as an occasional guest at his table. He cannot prevail upon himself to allow his children the advantages of a liberal education, to indulge them in any of the innocent gaieties of youth, or to introduce them into the world in a manner suitable to their rank and prospects in life. To his servants and dependents he behaves with unreasonable severity ;
requiring

requiring from them services beyond their ability; giving them the scanty rewards of their industry with a slow and reluctant hand; and refusing them that protection and assistance, in a time of need, which faithful servants have a natural right to expect from their masters. In fine, is he employed in any of the more public offices of civil life? His doors will always be open to the visits of bribery and corruption. Address yourself properly to his ruling passion; and you may render him blind to the real merits of any cause, and deaf to the cries of injured and oppressed innocence; you may persuade him to assist you, in depriving the distressed widow, or helpless orphan of their property; you may even tempt him to oppress, enslave, and betray his country.

Avarice, moreover, freezes up every warm and generous feeling of the heart, and renders a man incapable of beholding

beholding the calamities of his brethren, with the eye of compassion and tenderness. It steels the soul against the impressions of pity, and binds up the hand from acts of charity. Rather than relieve a wounded stranger, who happens to lie in his way, the covetous man will pass by on the other side. When an unhappy creature solicits his assistance, and nature, at the first sight of the miserable object, melts with sympathy; lest the powerful advocate in behalf of the wretched which heaven hath implanted in his bosom should prevail, avarice summons up all her strength, and suggests a thousand plausible excuses and subtle arguments, to dissuade him from the deed of charity.

“ Perhaps all this appearance of distress is only an artful disguise, to
“ impose upon my credulity, and extort my compassion: for ought
“ that

“ that I can tell, the person who sup-
 “ plicates my assistance may be an
 “ impostor; and why should I give
 “ heed to every idle tale, and waste
 “ my substance upon vagabonds?”

In this manner the churlish *Nabal* reasoned, when *David's* soldiers, who had been for some time in his neighbourhood, and instead of doing him an injury had defended his possessions, came to him to ask for a small quantity of provisions, to supply their present necessities. After having received a respectful message from *David*, he replied, “ Who is *David*? and who is
 “ the son of *Jesse*? There be many
 “ servants now-a-days that break away
 “ every man from his master: why
 “ then should I take my bread, and
 “ my water, and my flesh that I have
 “ killed for my shearers, and give
 “ them unto men I know not whence
 “ they be?” And thus every covetous
 man

man reasons in like circumstances: thus will he mistake his penuriousness and inhumanity for prudence and caution; and, through fear of being imposed upon by false pretences of poverty and wretchedness, will send away the necessitous and afflicted from his door, without relief and without pity. Benevolence will indeed teach us to examine into the merits of every case which addresses itself to our charity; that we may not waste those alms upon the undeserving, which might have been more usefully employed: but it is only covetousness and insensibility which can incline us to turn a deaf ear to the cries of the wretched, when it is in our power to relieve them.

At other times; when the case is too plain to admit of a debate, and too pitiable not to make some impression even upon the flinty heart of the covetous

vetous man; avarice hath recourse to a different set of arguments. She whispers in his ear, that he has other more immediate and urgent demands, which must be obeyed before the calls of charity can be regarded; that he has to provide for a numerous family; that he has expensive and hazardous schemes of business to pursue; that the figure he is obliged to make in the world, and the plan of life which he is under a necessity of observing, will not permit him to devote much of his substance to charitable uses; that there are many other persons, much more capable of contributing to such designs than himself, and when he sees them giving according to their ability, it will then be time enough for him to cast in his mite.

By such artful suggestions as these, doth Avarice often prevail over every tender feeling of humanity, and every
dictate

dictate of reason and religion? So much attention doth the covetous man generally pay to these considerations, as entirely to forget, that the greatest blessing which riches can bestow is a power of doing good; and that “to be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate,” is to “lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come.” Under the influence of avarice, glossed over with the specious colouring of prudence and œconomy he for the most part sends away the needy from his door, with nothing better than fair words and good wishes, and says unto them, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled,” without giving them those things which are needful.

But let us suppose, that for once his reason, his love of applause, or even his compassion gains the victory over

his avarice, and obliges him to perform some uncommon act of beneficence. The conquest is, after all, imperfect and momentary. When his heart is expanded to its utmost stretch, and he imagines that he hath done a great and meritorious deed, for which his neighbours will applaud him while he lives, and by which he hopes to lay up treasures in heaven; you may still discern the true features of his character, through this accidental lustre which surrounds it. There is so much persuasion and entreaty necessary to prevail upon him to do a charitable action; while he performs it, the lines of carefulness and frugality are so strongly marked upon his countenance; and after all, the gift itself is so inconsiderable and trifling; that you may see by what principle he is governed, and what is the idol of his heart, when he bestows an alms, no less than when he with-holds it.

Such

Such is the fatal influence of covetousness on the dispositions and manners of men! such the ravages which this base and destructive passion makes in the human heart!

After what hath been said to shew that avarice is inconsistent with virtue, little needs be added to prove that it is an enemy to the happiness of mankind. Since virtue is confessedly our highest good; whatever hath a tendency to destroy its influence over us, must, at the same time, be subversive of our felicity.

But, besides this, it may be observed, that avarice is an enemy to the happiness of mankind, as it leads them to direct their principal desires and pursuits towards an improper object. This is the argument by which our Saviour enforces the exhortation of the text: "Take heed and beware of
" cove-

" covetousness ; for a man's life con-
 sisteth not in the abundance of the
 things which he possesseth." If
 wealth be rightly improved, it may
 certainly procure for us a variety of
 gratifications ; and particularly, by
 enlarging our capacity of usefulness
 to our fellow-creatures, may afford us
 the greatest of all pleasures, that of
 doing good, in a degree which we
 could not otherwise enjoy. On these
 accounts it is desirable, and, under
 proper restrictions, worthy of our at-
 tention and pursuit. But it is surely
 estimating riches at much too high a
 rate, to imagine that they are capable
 of affording us complete felicity. The
 happiness of human nature consists of
 ingredients, which the greatest abun-
 dance of wealth cannot purchase. A
 healthful constitution ; a cultivated
 understanding ; well-regulated affec-
 tions ; a contented and chearful mind ;
 a good conscience ; the esteem and af-
 fection.

fection of the wise and virtuous among our fellow-creatures, and the approbation of Almighty God : these are things which cannot be gotten for gold, the price of which is above fine gold, or precious stones : these are things which the greatest monarch may want, and without which he must be wretched ; which the meanest peasant may possess, and having which he cannot but be happy.

But if we were to allow to riches all the value, which mankind, through the power of custom and a vitiated taste, are ready to ascribe to them ; it is surely sufficient to dissuade us from setting our hearts upon them as our chief good, to consider by what a precarious tenure we hold them ; and how soon we must part with them for ever. Do we not frequently see those who have most successfully laboured to increase their possessions, deprived
of

of them by some sudden and calamitous accident, which no sagacity could have foreseen; which no precaution could have prevented? how soon may that wealth, which hath been amassed by the industry of many years, be consumed by flames, or buried by stormy winds in the depth of the sea! How often doth the hand of fraud, or violence, deprive the honest and industrious of the fruit of their labour, and involve them in all the hardships of poverty! But if no calamitous accident should occur to rob us of our possessions; if we should carry our wealth with us to the borders of the grave, and even increase the beloved mass till the last day of our lives; after all, the time must come when we must part with the treasures which we have so industriously collected, and so carefully preserved: for “we brought nothing into
“ this

“ this world, and it is certain we can
“ carry nothing out.”

What, then, can the man who gives himself up to the dominion of avaricious passions expect, but to be continually harrassed with anxious cares and restless desires ; to meet with perpetual occasions of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, and at last to sit down in disappointment and despair? What can more clearly evince the folly of indulging these passions, than the consideration, that they lead us to seek for happiness, from an object in which it can never be found, and at the same time divert us from the pursuit of those intellectual, moral, and religious pleasures, which are the proper felicity of our reasonable nature, and which cannot fail to make us happy, as long as we continue to exist?

The

The sum of what hath been said is,
That it is impossible for a covetous
man to be either *virtuous* or *happy*.
What farther needs be urged, to en-
force the exhortation of the text,
“Take heed and beware of covetous-
ness?”

Let us all, then, as much as in us
lies, preserve ourselves free from the
dominion of Avarice. Let us guard
every avenue to our hearts with the
utmost care, to prevent the entrance
of so unworthy and dangerous a guest.
While we industriously employ our
time and abilities in making provision
for ourselves and our families, and
prudently improve every opportunity
which occurs of increasing our sub-
stance; let us be constantly upon our
guard, lest the desire of wealth should
so far gain the ascendancy in our
hearts, as to lead us to dishonourable
and iniquitous practices; to destroy
I the

the tender and generous feelings of our nature, and restrain us from performing acts of kindness and humanity to our brethren; to render us discontented with our condition, impatient under the common misfortunes of life, and anxious concerning the events of futurity; or finally, to fill us with gloomy and unworthy apprehensions of Divine Providence, and with ingratitude to the Author of all good. In the midst of all our concern to lay up treasures on earth; let us not neglect to seek after those durable riches, which are the rewards of righteousness, and by the steady practice of all virtue, to lay up treasures in heaven. In a word, "Let our conversation be without covetousness, and let us be content with such things as we have."

S E R M O N VI.

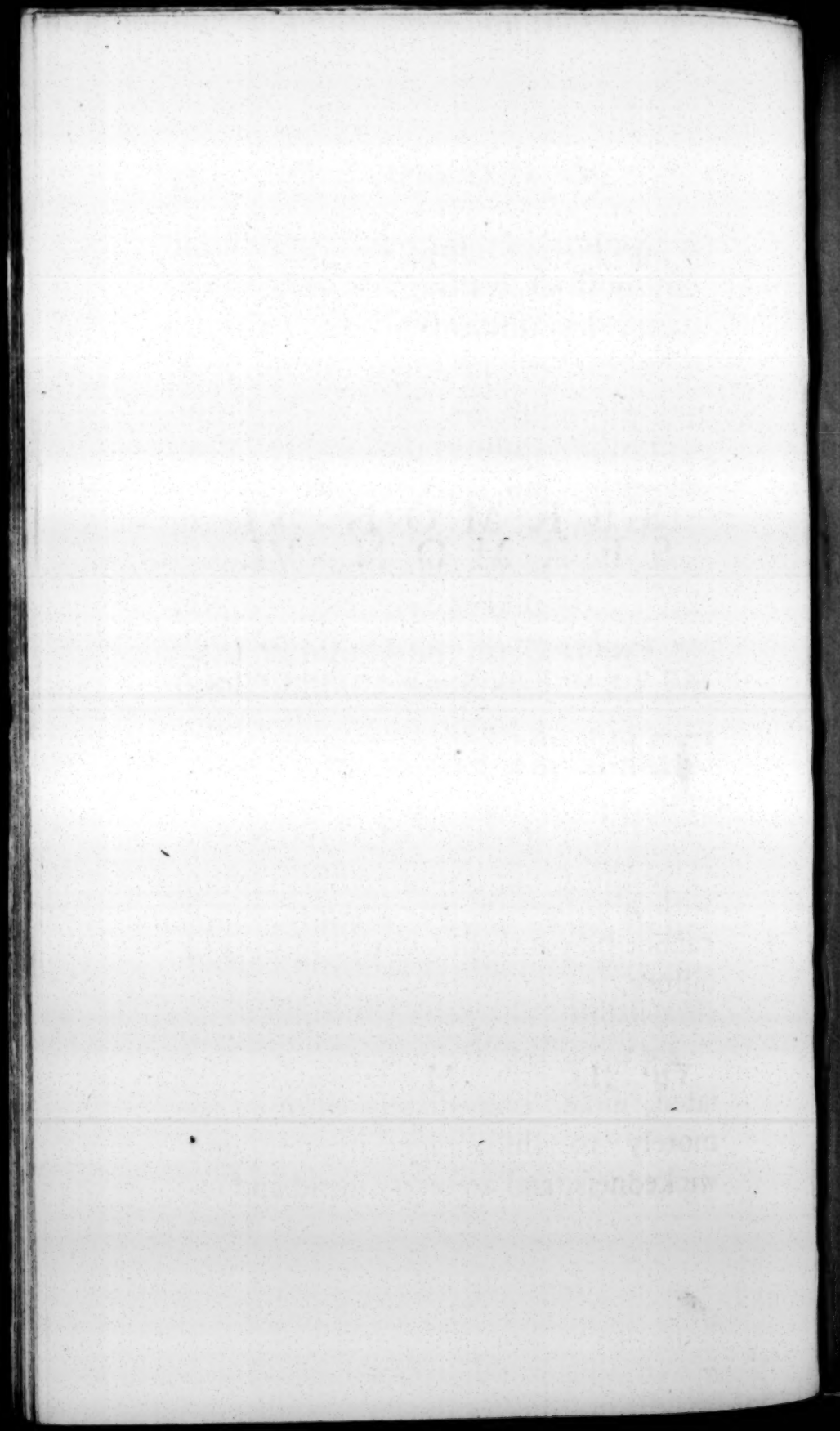
THE PRECEPTS OF CHRISTIANITY LIA-
BLE TO NO REASONABLE OBJECTION.

Τῶν δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ εὐαγγελίῳ παραγ-
γίλματα θαυμάσῃ — καὶ μεγάλα ἐπίσταμαι εἶναι —

TRYPHO apud JUSTIN. MART.

VOL. II.

H



S E R M O N VI.

J O H N vi. 60.

This is a hard saying ; who can bear it ?

THE principal character in which our Saviour appeared on earth, was that of a Preacher of righteousness ; and he supported this character with a propriety and dignity, which cannot be paralleled in the records of history.

All his public discourses were calculated, either immediately or more remotely to discourage impiety and wickedness, and to recommend and in-

force the practice of virtue. He did not insinuate himself into the affections of the people, by countenancing them in their pernicious errors and prejudices, or indulging them in their vicious practices. He did not affect to raise their astonishment by strange and visionary relations, or to gratify their curiosity, by solving abstruse and difficult questions. His wisdom and benevolence led him to take a much higher and nobler aim ; to make their improvement in real goodness of heart and life, the one great object of his attention. With this important design, he embraced every opportunity which occurred of addressing himself to the multitude. And he always employed such seasons, in reproving them for their immoral and licentious practices ; in exhorting them to a more strict regard to the great laws of sobriety, justice, charity, and religion ; in giving them particular directions
for

for the regulation of their conduct ; or in teaching them those truths which furnish the most important arguments for the practice of virtue.

In this last particular, a great part of his excellency, as a preacher of righteousness, consisted. For he taught the principles of religion in their simplicity and purity ; and placed them in such a light, as was best adapted to make a deep and lasting impression upon the hearts of his hearers. He gave mankind the most just and rational ideas of the moral perfections and character of the Supreme Being. He taught them to conceive of him, as the great searcher of hearts and judge of actions, the almighty friend and rewarder of the righteous, and the father of mercies, who forgives the sins of all sincere penitents, and accepts the obedience of all those whose hearts are upright before him. He moreover

H 3 instructed

instructed his disciples to expect a future state of equitable retribution, in which those who live in the violation of the sacred laws of virtue and religion, shall receive that doom from the hands of their Maker, which his perfect wisdom shall judge necessary to answer the ends of his government; and in which the righteous shall be crowned with honour and happiness inconceivable and everlasting. By such solemn sanctions did our Saviour enforce his precepts: thus powerfully did he address himself to the hopes and fears of those who attended upon his preaching.

A farther excellence attending his instructions was, that they were delivered in the most plain and familiar, and, at the same time, in the most convincing and persuasive manner which can be conceived. In his discourses, he made use of no pomp and
parade

parade of language; he introduced no abstruse reasonings or refined speculations. He well knew, that the former would have been casting flowers before the multitude, instead of giving them substantial and wholesome food; and that the latter would be speaking to them in an unknown tongue. He therefore wisely avoided both these extremes; and delivered the most important truths and useful precepts, with all the simplicity and perspicuity of which language is capable. He did not however neglect to make use of such methods, as seemed best adapted to awaken the attention of his hearers, and interest their affections. He frequently cloathed his admonitions and exhortations in the pleasing dress of history or fable, and placed before their imaginations a lively picture of the virtues which he recommended, or the vices which he reprov'd. Thus while he enlightened

instructed his disciples to expect a future state of equitable retribution, in which those who live in the violation of the sacred laws of virtue and religion, shall receive that doom from the hands of their Maker, which his perfect wisdom shall judge necessary to answer the ends of his government; and in which the righteous shall be crowned with honour and happiness inconceivable and everlasting. By such solemn sanctions did our Saviour enforce his precepts: thus powerfully did he address himself to the hopes and fears of those who attended upon his preaching.

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H 4 their

their understandings with the most important knowledge, he spoke with the most persuasive energy to their hearts.

On the whole, whether we consider the nature and tendency of our Saviour's discourses, or the manner in which he addressed himself to the people, we shall be convinced that he possessed every qualification requisite to complete the character of a preacher of righteousness, and shall see reason to say concerning him, "Never man spake like this man."

But notwithstanding all this, we find in the text, that some of the followers of Christ, mistaking the design and spirit of a figurative discourse which he had just delivered, said concerning the doctrine he had been teaching them, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" And this language hath
been

been frequently applied to some of our Saviour's precepts ; which, according to the opinion of many persons, are unreasonable and severe injunctions, inconsistent with the feelings of human nature, and unfriendly to the interests of mankind.

That the pure system of morality which Christ hath taught may be rescued from unjust censure, and that our regard to his laws and authority may not be weakened by groundless surmises ; let us then at this time, distinctly examine those christian precepts, which at first sight appear most burdensome, and which have frequently been represented as hard sayings.

It hath often been insisted upon by the enemies of christianity as a defect in its system of morals, that it absolutely prohibits the use of oaths, even in the most solemn transactions. This

objection is founded upon the following precept in our Saviour's sermon on the mount. "Ye have heard that
 " it hath been said by them of old
 " time, Thou shalt not forswear thy-
 " self, but shall perform unto the Lord
 " thine oaths: but I say unto you,
 " swear not at all; neither by heaven,
 " for it is God's throne; nor by the
 " earth, for it is his footstool; neither
 " by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the
 " great King: neither shalt thou swear
 " by thine head; because thou canst
 " not make one hair white or black:
 " but let your communication be yea,
 " yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is
 " more than these cometh of evil."

Nothing is more evident, than that an oath, which is a solemn appeal to the Almighty as the witness of the truth of our assertions, is in its nature lawful; and the experience of mankind sufficiently proves the utility and
 import-

importance of this practice. It is not therefore to be imagined, that our Saviour meant entirely to prohibit the use of oaths, in judicial proceedings. Nor is there any thing in the passage under consideration to warrant such a supposition.

It is worthy of notice, that, in the discourse in which we find this precept, it is the manifest intention of our Saviour not to supersede the moral laws of *Moses*, but to make improvements upon them, and carry them to a degree of refinement and perfection before unknown. He doth not lay aside the Mosaic laws respecting murder, adultery, divorce, retaliation, and the love of our neighbour; but he requires from his disciples higher degrees of virtue than these laws enjoin—teaching them to abstain from rash anger, and irregular desires; to allow of divorces only in
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case

case of infidelity ; to submit to lesser injuries ; and to love even their enemies. To preserve the uniformity and adhere to the design of his discourse ; he must therefore be supposed, not absolutely to prohibit the use of oaths (for then the law against perjury would have been entirely superseded) but only to discourage the practice of profane swearing, which prevailed among the Jews.

And this supposition is confirmed by the account which their own authors give of their practice in this respect. Though they thought it highly criminal to make use of the name of God on light and trivial occasions ; they allowed themselves to swear by the creatures of God, and did not consider such oaths as equally binding with those, in which a direct appeal was made to the deity. This being the case it is natural to suppose, that
our

our Saviour, observing that this custom tended to destroy their reverence for an oath, and to weaken their religious principles, thought proper to guard his followers against it in the words under consideration, which may accordingly be thus paraphrased.

“ You have been taught that per-
 “ jury in the use of judicial oaths is
 “ an heinous crime; and doubtless it
 “ is: but let me admonish you, that
 “ it is not sufficient to preserve you
 “ free from this crime, that instead
 “ of swearing by the Maker of all,
 “ you swear by his creatures; for
 “ even these kind of oaths are in ef-
 “ fect an appeal to him. Not only
 “ therefore guard against perjury in
 “ your more solemn appeals to hea-
 “ ven, but beware of involving your-
 “ selves in guilt, by appealing to the
 “ creatures of God in your ordinary
 “ intercourse with each other. In all
 “ cases

“ cases in which you have accustomed
 “ yourselves to this practice, learn
 “ to express your sentiments with
 “ greater plainness and simplicity, and
 “ content yourselves with a bare as-
 “ firmation or denial. For to go far-
 “ ther than this, discovers wrong dis-
 “ positions, and will probably involve
 “ you in guilt. Do not at all venture
 “ to swear by heaven, by the earth,
 “ by Jerusalem, or by any other simi-
 “ lar oath; but instead of this, let
 “ your communication be yea, yea,
 “ nay, nay.”

On the whole it is, I think, evident, beyond reasonable dispute, that christianity doth not prohibit the use of solemn judicial oaths. (*a*)

In the next place, Let us consider the precept of our Saviour, which re-

(*a*) See this point more fully discussed in Abp. Secker's sermons, vol. iv. sermon 12.

quires

quires that we should not retaliate injuries. “ Ye have heard that it
 “ hath been said, An eye for an eye,
 “ and a tooth for a tooth; but I say
 “ unto you that ye resist not evil; but
 “ whosoever shall smite thee on the
 “ right cheek, turn to him the other
 “ also: and if any man will sue thee
 “ at the law, and take away thy coat,
 “ let him have thy cloak also: and
 “ whosoever shall compel thee to go a
 “ mile, go with him twain.” This
 precept hath been understood to require a quiet submission to all kinds of injuries, without shewing any resentment, or seeking for any redress; and even that we should voluntarily lay ourselves in the way of a second insult or injury, after we have patiently submitted to the first. But it can never be supposed that the Author of those wise and useful rules of conduct, with which the gospel abounds, could be capable of laying upon his
 fol-

followers so arbitrary, absurd, and unnatural an injunction. He could not but be sensible, that resentment is a natural passion, designed by our Maker to defend us from injurious treatment; and that it is inconsistent with the safety of individuals, and the happiness of society, that all kinds of contempt and abuse shall be entirely overlooked and pass unpunished. It is therefore nothing more than that kind of justice which is due, and which we should readily allow, to any writer who discovers evident marks of good sense and wisdom, to explain the general precept under consideration with some restrictions, and to understand the instances by which it is illustrated, not in a literal, but in a proverbial sense. The utmost that this injunction can possibly be supposed to require is, that we should rather hazard a second injury or wrong, than rigorously punish our
adver-

adversary for the first. And even this cannot be enjoined upon us in all cases whatever, without any limitation; but only when the injury is of such a nature, as doth not interfere with the public order and safety, and may be supported without any considerable inconvenience. That this is the meaning of the precept, is evident, not only from the reason of the thing, but from the particular cases by which our Saviour illustrates it. They plainly prohibit resentment or retaliation only in such lesser assaults and injuries, respecting our person, property, or liberty, as may be endured without great and lasting prejudice. Whereas, if it had been the intention of Christ absolutely to prohibit his disciples from seeking redress in all cases whatever, he would doubtless have instanced in affairs of greater moment.

Now

Now, there is nothing in this christian precept, thus explained, which is not perfectly consonant to the dictates of reason, and which doth not tend to promote the happiness of mankind. If every man were to indulge a spirit of revenge, and on every slight provocation, render evil for evil, it is most evident, that the world would soon become a scene of universal discord and confusion. But to pass by those affronts or injuries, which either were not directly and maliciously intended, or are not capable of producing very serious and fatal consequences, is the most effectual means of preserving that harmony and peace, which is a jewel of such inestimable value, that it can scarcely be purchased at too high a rate. Besides, the man who accustoms himself to overlook affronts and injuries, most effectually consults his own safety and happiness. He is less frequently
in

in danger of being agitated by disagreeable and restless passions in his own mind; and he is more secure from external insult and abuse. While the man, who indulges warm resentments, and delights in revenge, magnifies every instance of neglect or incivility, into an intended affront and an heinous offence, and thus afflicts and torments himself, instead of punishing his adversary; the meek and humble christian, who exercises forbearance and forgiveness towards his enemies, enjoys perpetual tranquility in his own mind, and by learning of him who was meek and lowly of heart, finds rest unto his soul. This mild and gentle behaviour is, moreover, the most probable means of bringing the person who hath injured us to a sense of his fault, and of making our enemies to be at peace with us. An implacable and revengeful spirit increases and perpetuates quarrels, and
con-

continually provokes fresh insults. But “a soft answer turneth away wrath;” and there are few people, who have such a degree of insensibility and cruelty in their tempers, as to be capable of persevering in acts of unkindness to a person, who instead of rendering abuse for abuse, and injury for injury, is disposed to overcome evil with good.

But this naturally leads us to take notice of another christian precept, which hath sometimes been objected to, as unreasonable and unnatural, that we should love our enemies. It hath been said, that an enemy is a proper object of hatred and aversion, and that therefore it is unnatural and impossible for us to love our enemies, under that consideration, and upon that account. But is not this a gross and palpable perversion of our Saviour’s meaning? Is it impossible for
us

us in any sense, to love our enemies, unless we take complacency in them because they are such? Doth not that man love his enemy, who is heartily disposed to be reconciled to him upon an acknowledgment of his fault, and even previous to this, is ready to perform towards him the offices of humanity and kindness? Doth not that man love his enemy, who laments his follies, pities his misfortune, treats him with mildness and gentleness, and renders good for evil? Doth not that man love his enemy, who, when he hungers, will feed him, and when he thirsts, will give him drink? And what is there in such conduct as this, inconsistent with the uncorrupted feelings of the human heart, unworthy of our reasonable nature, or injurious to the interests of mankind? Hath not such conduct as this been in all ages considered as an instance of superior and uncommon virtue, and as highly worthy

thy of applause? And that this is the conduct which our Saviour requires from his followers, when he commands them to love their enemies, is clear from his own illustration of the precept; for he adds, “ Bless them
“ that curse you, do good to them
“ that hate you; and pray for them
“ who despitefully use you, and perse-
“ cute you.”

Farther, those christian precepts have often been considered as hard sayings, which require us, not to lay up treasures on earth, but in heaven; to set our affections on things above, not on things below; not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world. But it ought to be considered, in the first place, that the particular office and situation of Christ and his first followers, as they were employed in introducing a new system of religion into the world, and must

of course be exposed to much opposition and persecution, required that they should possess such a degree of indifference to the riches and honours of this world, and be influenced by the belief and expectation of a future state, in such a manner, as may not perhaps be necessary in the ordinary state of things. To this particular circumstance it is to be ascribed, that the rich young man, whom our Saviour required to part with his possessions, went away sorrowful, not having fortitude sufficient to carry him through the difficulties, to which the followers of Christ were at first necessarily exposed. And on this account it was, that our Saviour so frequently declared it to be peculiarly difficult, and next to impossible, for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. For a man possessed of great wealth, to become the disciple of a master, who himself endured the
hard-

hardships of poverty, reproach, and persecution, and taught his followers to expect no better treatment from the world, would require a degree of resolution and virtue scarcely to be expected.

An attention to the actual state of things, when these precepts, respecting the pursuit of riches and the love of the world, were delivered by our Saviour, will convince us that they had a temporary propriety and reasonableness, peculiar to the time of the first publication of Christianity. And the same may be observed concerning those precepts, in which Christ requires his followers to deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow him; and to be ready to part with houses and lands, with father and mother, brethren and sisters, and even with life itself, rather than desert him and his cause. It can only be in seasons,

when the interests of virtue and religion require it—when a man cannot approve himself faithful to his Maker, to his fellow-creatures, and to his own conscience, without suffering persecution—that these precepts can be literally obeyed. And at such a season, he doth not deserve the honourable appellation of an *honest man*, much less that of a *good christian*, who will not resist even unto blood, striving against sin.

Nevertheless, even these precepts, which took their rise from the particular situation of Christ and his disciples, are capable of being applied to the use of christians in every age, and in every condition of life. As professors of christianity, we are doubtless required to live under the influence of the great principles which it teacheth, and particularly, to be habitually governed in our actions by the belief

170 S E R M O N VI.

and expectation of a future state : it is our duty to pursue the good things of this life, only in that manner and degree, which shall be consistent with our improvement in virtue, and our hopes of immortality ; and we are bound to preserve our appetites and passions under constant regulation, and to abstain from all such indulgences as would be inconsistent with the dictates of reason and religion. And to act in this manner is to deny ourselves ; to set our affections on things above, not on things below, and to lay up treasures in heaven. But what is there in all this, from which a good man would wish to be excused ; or to which a wise regard to our own interest would not lead us ?

From what has been said it appears, that even those precepts of Christianity, which seem at first view to be unreasonable or burdensome

some, have in reality nothing in them inconsistent with the principles of nature, or the happiness of mankind; and that we have no sufficient ground to say concerning any of them, "This " is an hard saying, who can hear it?"

If then the laws of Christ be unexceptionable, excellent and divine; let us, my brethren, make them the subject of our careful study, and frequent meditation. That we may gain an accurate acquaintance with our duty, and a just sense of its importance, let us lay up those maxims and rules of conduct, which the gospel contains, in our memories and our hearts. "Let " the word of Christ dwell in us richly " in all wisdom." Remembering that speculation is not religion, and that we shall be in fact the better for the divine instructions of our Saviour, only so far as they take possession of our hearts, and produce the fruits of righteousness

in our lives, let us bring every thought, every desire, every affection of our souls, and every action of our lives, into subjection to the laws of Christ; that at last we may become partakers of that eternal life, which is promised to all his sincere disciples.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN NOT ASHAMED
OF THE GOSPEL.

*Ητις ὡ ποιητὰς ποιεῖ, ὡ φιλοσόφος καλῶς κενεάζει, ὡ δὲ
ρητορας δεινὸς, ἀλλὰ παιδεύουσα ποιεῖ τὰς θνητὰς
ἀθανάτους, τὰς βροτῶν θεός.

J U S T. M A R T.

3 E R M O N V I I
3 E R M O N V I I

THE TRITE OLD FASHIONED

the words of the text
the words of the text

S E R M O N VII.

ROMANS I. 16.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ;
for it is the power of God unto salvation
to every one that believeth.*

THUS boldly did the Apostle Paul assert his high esteem of the religion of Jesus Christ, and his firm resolution to adhere to his profession of it, amidst the reproaches and censures of the Jews his countrymen, and the ridicule and contempt of the Gentiles. The sentiments which he expresses in the words of the text, are such as these :

‘ I glory in the gospel of Christ,
‘ and triumph in the name of christian.
‘ I am willing to appear in that
‘ character wherever I go, and look
‘ upon it as the highest honour which
‘ could have been conferred upon me,
‘ that I am called to be an Apostle,
‘ separated unto the gospel of God.
‘ I see so much of the excellence of
‘ christianity, and am so fully persuaded
‘ that it is a faithful saying,
‘ and worthy of all acceptation, that
‘ I had rather wear the title of an
‘ Apostle of Christ, than possess the
‘ highest seat in the Jewish Sanhedrim,
‘ or the Roman Senate. I am
‘ a debtor both to the Greeks and
‘ the Barbarians, to the wise and the
‘ unwise; so much as in me lies, I
‘ am ready to preach the gospel at
‘ Rome also. In the face of all my
‘ fellow-citizens, I will glory in the
‘ religion of Christ. Nor will I fear
‘ the censures of the world, or the
‘ assaults

‘ assaults of persecution itself in its
 ‘ most horrid forms. Let mine ene-
 ‘ mies reproach me for becoming a
 ‘ follower of a despised and crucified
 ‘ Saviour : let them ridicule me for
 ‘ associating myself with a herd of
 ‘ illiterate fishermen : let them exer-
 ‘ cise against me all the cruelty which
 ‘ cunning, under the influence of
 ‘ malice, can invent. None of these
 ‘ things move me ; neither count I
 ‘ my life dear unto me, that I may
 ‘ finish my course with joy, and the
 ‘ ministry which I have received of
 ‘ the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel
 ‘ of the grace of God. For this is
 ‘ my earnest expectation and my
 ‘ hope, that in nothing I shall be
 ‘ ashamed, but that with all boldness
 ‘ I shall be ready that Christ should
 ‘ be magnified by me, whether it be
 ‘ by my life, or my death.’

These were the sentiments which animated the heart, and influenced

the conduct of this great Apostle. And who, that is duly sensible of the excellence of the cause which he espoused, and considers that christianity is in every view worthy of God, and full of the richest blessings to mankind, can wonder, that he engaged in the most difficult services, and submitted to the most painful sufferings on its account, with unshaken fortitude and magnanimity? Who can wonder to hear him preaching Christ in the synagogue of the Jews; to find him singing psalms, and praising God, in the prison at Philippi; to see him standing up with firmness and intrepidity before Felix and Agrippa, and with the greatest calmness, and most manly eloquence, making his defence; to hear him, at the close of his labours and sufferings on earth, saying; “ I
 “ have fought a good fight; I have
 “ finished my course; I have kept the
 “ faith; henceforth there is laid up
 “ for

“ for me a crown of righteousness,
 “ which the Lord, the righteous
 “ judge, will give me at that day.”
 To say and to do all this, was only to
 act upon the noble principles of christianity. He knew that the gospel of
 Christ was “ the power of God unto
 “ salvation,” and therefore it was that
 he was “ not ashamed of it.”

By the term salvation in our text
 we are doubtless to understand, in general, the deliverance of mankind
 from vice, with its fatal consequences,
 and their improvement in virtue, and
 preparation for everlasting happiness.
 Now, the great design for which
 Christ appeared in the world was, thus
 to save men from their sins. And if
 we examine the nature of his religion,
 we shall find that it provides the most
 proper means for the accomplishment
 of this end, and therefore is, “ the
 “ power of God unto salvation.”

To

To accomplish the salvation of men, in the sense now explained, it pleased the great and merciful Father of all, by our Saviour Jesus Christ, to declare his clemency and compassion towards sinners, for the encouragement of all sincere penitents; and to furnish us with every important advantage for destroying our vicious habits, and raising us to the proper perfection and happiness of our nature, which consist in regular affections and virtuous actions.

To remove every painful suspicion from our minds, with respect to the divine placability, and give us the fullest assurance, that the man who confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy, the Almighty sent his well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, that he might publish the glad tidings of peace on earth, and good will towards men; and that he might
at

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at last give up his life a ransom for many, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

To turn us from the love and practice of vice, and establish in our minds a proper regard to our Maker, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves, the gospel of Christ gives us the clearest and most perfect instructions with respect to every branch of our duty. It, moreover, sets before us the perfect character of our Saviour, who hath recommended by his own conduct every religious, every social, and every personal virtue; every thing which can adorn and exalt human nature; excepting only those duties which are consequent upon, and peculiar to a state of guilt, and which therefore would have been inconsistent with the perfection of his character. The gospel of Christ likewise sets before us every motive to excite us to persevere
in

in the path of well-doing, which can be supposed to operate upon the human mind. Sometimes it addresses our fears, and deters us from sin by the terrors of the Lord: it sets vice before us in all its most odious forms, and describes its consequences in this world, and that which is to come: it forewarns us of the doom which will be pronounced, and of the punishment which will be inflicted, upon all the workers of iniquity, at the day of final retribution. At other times it allures us to duty, by exciting our love, our gratitude, and our hope. It paints religion in the most pleasing colours; and describes the satisfaction which the good man derives from the testimony of his conscience, and the peace which he possesses at that season, when the wicked are as the troubled sea. It sets before us the compassion of our Saviour, who gave himself for

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us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It gives us a view of that happy state, in which this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory; where every tear shall be wiped from every eye, and peace and joy shall fill every heart.

Such are the motives, which the gospel of Christ lays before us, to animate us under the difficulties which attend a religious life; to arm us against the temptations which obstruct our progress in virtue; and to excite us to be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Such views did the Apostle *Paul* entertain of christianity, as a sufficient means of restoring mankind to
virtue

virtue and happiness, when he declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

And these views of the christian religion ought to have the same effect upon us, which they had upon him; for the gospel of Christ is now, no less than it was in the days of the Apostle, "the power of God unto salvation." We see its happy influence upon the hearts and lives of men at present; and may observe many in the world, who evidently live under the influence of christian principles, guide their actions by christian rules, and entertain the hopes which christianity is adapted to inspire, who may, with the utmost propriety, be stiled "the excellent of the earth." We have ourselves experienced the happy influence of christianity; and have derived from it, direction in the practice of our duty,

ty, consolation under trouble, and joy in the expectation of eternal life. What farther motives need be urged, to excite us to a steady and unshaken attachment to our holy religion, or to lead us to such a course of action, as will be a perpetual demonstration that we are “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ?”

To shew what this course is, or to point out the methods, by which we may manifest to the world, that we are so influenced by the consideration, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, as not to be ashamed of it, shall be the business of the remaining part of this discourse.

We may discover this, in the first place, by living agreeably to the precepts of christianity, and “ordering our conversation as becometh the gospel.”

Now

Now this we cannot do, without being devout and humble worshippers of the most high God, useful and honourable members of society, and shining examples of every personal virtue.

The gospel gives us the most sublime and pleasing representations of Almighty God, as a Being possessed of all possible perfections; as the great Creator of all things, and particularly as the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits, on whom we continually depend for our being and happiness; and as the supreme ruler of the world, and the sovereign judge of actions and of hearts, by whose laws we must be governed, and to whom we must finally give an account. By these representations, it lays us under the strongest obligations, frequently and devoutly to adore the divine perfections; to cultivate

vate a grateful sense of the infinite condescension and kindness of our heavenly father towards us; to cherish an habitual fear of offending him; constantly to study and practise his will, and to make it the business of our lives to secure his approbation.

Farther, christianity acquaints us with our own nature and circumstances, and strongly inculcates, both by precept and example, the several virtues which arise from thence. It requires us to adorn our characters with temperance, purity, humility, industry, contentment, a superiority of mind to the events of this life, and a continual regard to that which is to come.

In like manner, the gospel urges us to the love of our neighbour, and the cultivation of those kind and benevolent affections towards our fellow-creatures,

tures, which shone with such peculiar lustre in the character of Christ, who "went about doing good." It teacheth us to maintain the strictest equity in our dealings, unshaken fidelity in our friendship, and an exact regard to truth in all our words; to shew compassion to the indigent; and, on every proper occasion, to cherish and express a forgiving temper towards those who have injured or offended us.

That these virtues are required, and strongly enforced in the gospel, the least acquaintance with its contents must have been sufficient to convince us. If, therefore, we endeavour to cultivate and practise them, on the principles of christianity, we shall give the world an incontestible proof, that we highly esteem and value it. Men will naturally and reasonably conclude, that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, if they

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they see, that we not only profess our faith in it, and make it the subject of conversation, but that we practise the duties which it enjoins—if they see that it is our serious and habitual care, to imprint its laws in living characters upon our hearts, and to make our lives a perpetual comment upon them.

In this manner we are each of us capable of discovering our attachment to the religion of Christ. And this we may do, as long as we live, in every possible situation and condition. No scene of difficulty or distress can ever arise, in which it will not be possible for us, either by our patience in suffering, or our zeal in action, to manifest that we have imbibed the true spirit of christianity.

Let us, then, study the precepts of the gospel, till we have a clear and comprehensive view of our duty. Let
us

us contemplate the life and actions of our Saviour's till we are fired with emulation, to rise to his excellence of character; let us contemplate the motives which the gospel suggests, till we feel their energy upon our hearts, constraining us to "deny ungodliness" and all worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and piously in the "present world." With these precepts continually in our view; powerfully animated by these examples and motives; let us manifest to the world, that we are in truth, what we profess ourselves, disciples of Christ—that we have studied his gospel, till, by the happy influence of it, we are filled with a sincere and ardent love of virtue; till every rule of life which christianity prescribes is written upon our understandings; till every disposition which it tends to inspire is established in our hearts; till every branch of virtue, which it recommends, is made

made visible in our conduct. Thus shall we at once give the world a convincing proof, that we *are not* ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and become ourselves living proofs, *how much reason* we have not to be ashamed of it.

Farther to manifest this, we should persevere in the profession and practice of christianity in the midst of the greatest difficulties, and the most violent opposition. If we be determined to be christians indeed, we must resolve that we will withstand the assaults of ridicule, of temptation, and even of persecution itself, if we should be called to so severe a trial of our fortitude.

It is far from being impossible, that the upright christian may meet with persons of licentious principles, and corrupt manners, who will make the pure morality and rational piety which
 chris-

christianity enjoins, the subject of their ridicule, and will employ all the powers of wit and railery to divert his regard from it. But he will persevere in the path of his duty, unmindful of all the darts, which ridicule or contempt can cast at him; and, in the midst of them all, will declare by actions, which speak louder than words, that he is “not
 “ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” He will manifest the sincerity of his virtuous and christian principles, by holding fast his integrity, when he cannot do it without even dissolving the strongest bands of friendship, or exposing himself to the greatest temporal inconveniences. The language of his heart, and of his actions, in such a situation, will be: “I am a
 “christian; I dare not, I cannot break
 “the laws of him, whom I acknow-
 , “ledge as a teacher sent from God—
 “whose yoke is easy, and whose bur-
 “den

“ den is light. Rather let me give up
 “ every earthly delight; let a humble
 “ cottage, and the meanest garb be
 “ the portion of my life, with the
 “ pleasing consciousness of having pre-
 “ served my innocence, and obeyed
 “ the laws of Christ; than all the
 “ riches and magnificence of a pa-
 “ lace, with the painful reflection of
 “ having purchased them at the ex-
 “ pence of my virtuous and christian
 “ principles.”

I add, that notwithstanding we live
 in an age in which the principles of
 liberty, both civil and religious, are
 so well understood, and the happy ef-
 fects of it are so generally enjoyed;
 it is not impossible that persecution
 may, in some future period, arise out
 of the ruins of knowledge and liberty,
 and again spread torture and death
 through the world. Let us then sup-
 pose what the present enlightened state

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of

of things, and the general spirit of the times, forbids us to fear—let us suppose, that the followers of Christ are liable to public censure, and in perpetual danger of being brought under the lash of persecution, by the hand of the civil magistrate. In this trying situation, how will the christian, who is fully convinced that the gospel of Christ is from God, and that it is his duty to profess and obey it in the midst of all opposition, behave? Will he shrink back, and shudder, at the prospect of the difficulties which lie before him? At first, perhaps, his nature may. But he will soon recollect himself; and, calling up to his assistance every animated consideration, which reason or christianity can suggest, he will say, with the great Apostle, whose christian heroism we have been considering; “I am ready, not
“ to be bound only, but also to die,
“ for the name of the Lord Jesus.”
Or,

Or, if he be not actually called to pass through the fiery trial, and even if he be excused from suffering lesser persecutions (which may frequently be the case in these peaceful and happy times) he will still possess that lively persuasion that the gospel is "the power of God to salvation," and maintain that steady purpose to persevere in the profession and practice of it, which would be abundantly sufficient to carry him through all the thorny road of persecution.

To be able thus courageously to withstand all the attacks of ridicule, censure, and persecution; from principle to adhere to the profession, and persevere in the practice of christianity, alike unmoved by the smiles and the frowns of the world; this, christians, this is, in reality, not to be ashamed of the gospel.

But we shall give the most striking proof that we are not "ashamed of the gospel of Christ," if, after having supported the character of christians through life, we add the testimony of our dying bed.

To be convinced of this, we need only take a view of the good Christian, whose life hath been uniformly regulated by the precepts of the gospel, in his last moments. At this season, he can derive no farther consolation from the enjoyments of the present life; for he must now be separated from them for ever. He must now make the important experiment, what it is to die. But is he alarmed and distressed at the prospect? Does he shrink back with consternation at the approach of death, and look upon him as the king of terrors? No! Even in this situation, the delightful prospects which christianity opens before him

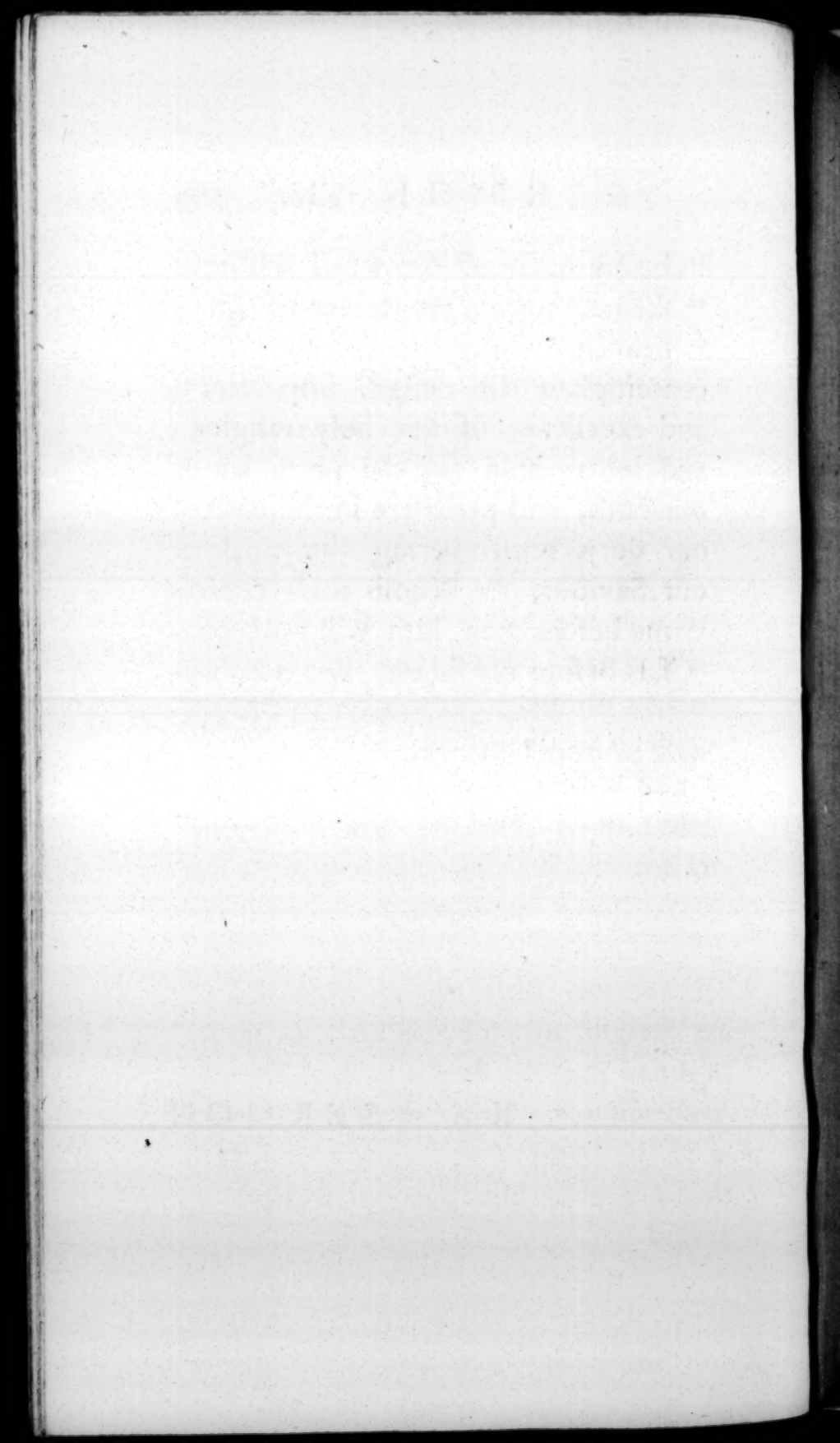
him beyond the grave, afford him sufficient support. Enjoying the testimony of a good conscience, “that in
 “simplicity and godly sincerity he hath
 “had his conversation in the world,” he can entertain the animating hope, that his dismissal from this world of imperfection, will prove a joyful introduction to a state of perfect and everlasting felicity. Death therefore, with respect to him, loses its sting, and the grave its horrors. By the serenity and joy which appear upon his countenance, even when it is overspread with the cold dews of death; by the cheerfulness of his accents, even when they flow from a faltering tongue, he gives spectators a convincing proof that the hope, with which christianity had inspired him through life, doth not make him ashamed, in this most trying of all seasons, and says unto them, “See in what peace
 “a christian can die.

Such a testimony may each of us give to the excellence of our holy religion, in the concluding scenes of life! then will it appear beyond the possibility of a doubt, that we “are
“not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

We have now seen what influence the consideration, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation had upon the mind of the Apostle *Paul*. We have seen that it ought to have the same influence upon us, to excite us to a strict conformity to it both in profession and practice, in the midst of all opposition, and even to the latest moment of our lives.

Let none of us, then, receive this grace of God in vain; or neglect the great salvation which he hath wrought for us by Jesus Christ; for our Saviour hath declared; “He that is
“shamed of me, and of my words
“before

“ before men, of him will I also be a-
“ shamed before my father who is in
“ heaven.” But let us frequently
contemplate the design, importance,
and excellence of our holy religion ;
and let us hold fast the profession of
our faith, and persevere in the path of
our duty, remembering the words of
our Saviour, “ Whoso shall confess
“ me before men, him will I also con-
“ fess before my father, who is in hea-
“ ven.” May this honour and happi-
ness be ours ! Amen.

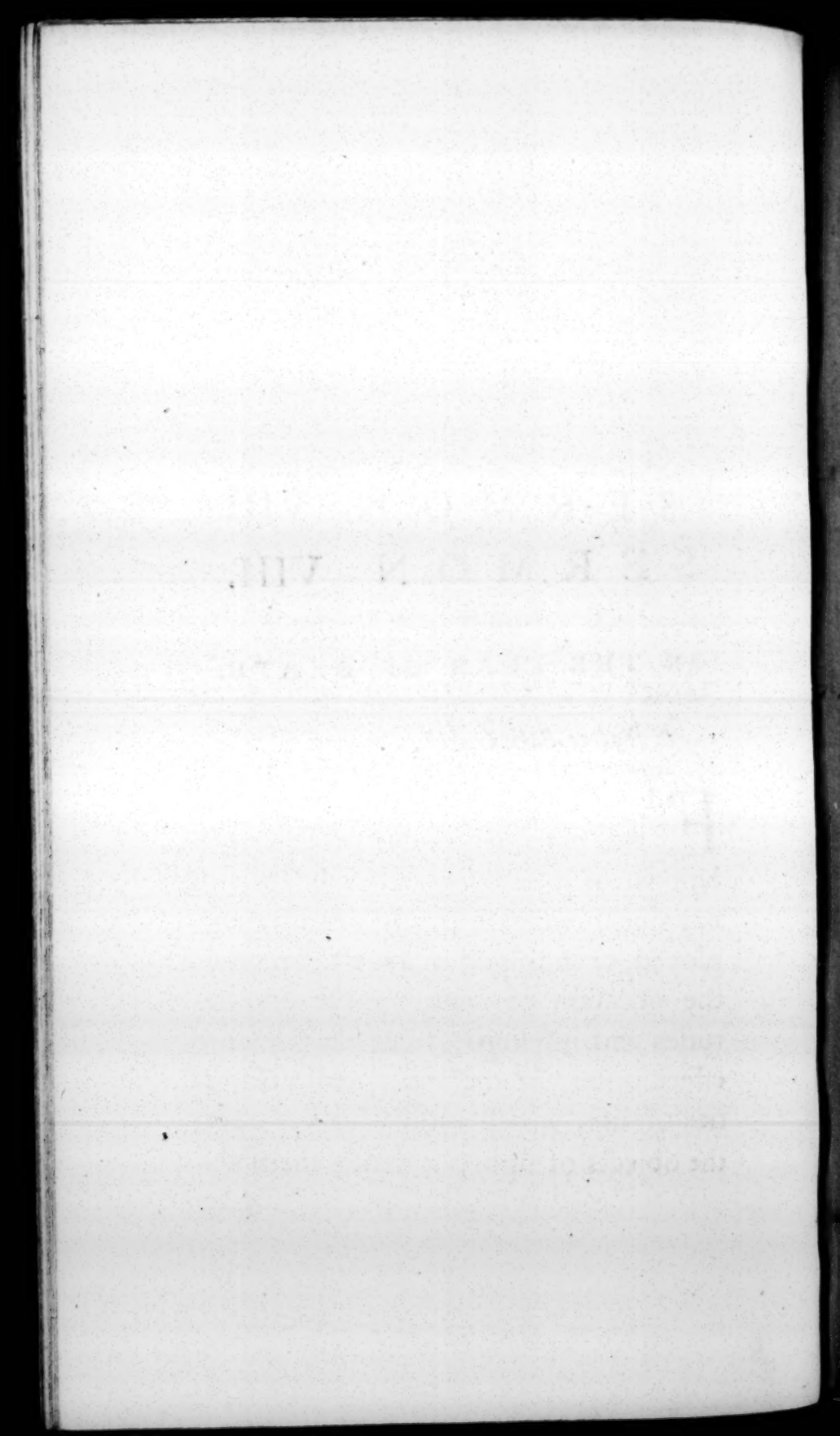


S E R M O N V I I I .

ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

*Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.*

H O R.



S E R M O N VIII.

P S A L M xxiii 4.

*Though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*

FE A R, though a natural passion,
and capable, under proper regulations, of ministring to our safety and happiness when it is injudiciously employed, or indulged to excess, becomes the occasion of innumerable disquietudes and infelicities. It has the same effect upon the real evils and calamities of life, which a misty air has upon the objects of sight; it makes them appear

pear confused and indistinct, and at the same time much larger than they are in reality. It leads us to consider those events as certain, or at least highly probable, of the arrival of which there is perhaps little more than a bare possibility. It teacheth us to create for ourselves afflictions, which have no existence but in our own imagination; and obliges us to endure a thousand times, in idea, those ills, which nature intended us to suffer but once: and ideal sufferings are, perhaps, of all others the most insupportable. In circumstances of actual danger, it casts us off our guard, perplexes our judgment, enfeebles our resolution, and incapacitates us for pursuing the proper measures for our defence or support. And, even in seasons of the greatest outward prosperity, it fills the mind with a settled gloom, which, like the jaundiced eye, discolours every object around it; and thus disturbs
our

our tranquillity, and indisposeth us for the true enjoyment of life.

The truth of these remarks, there are few persons, perhaps, who are not able in some degree to attest, from their own experience. There are few persons, who have not afflicted themselves with the apprehension of events, which have either never happened, or have proved much more favourable than their gloomy imaginations had represented them.

But the object which is, of all others, most universally dreaded, and which most frequently raises unnecessary and groundless fears in the hearts of men, is death. And it requires all the aids of philosophy, and of religion, to enable the wisest and best of us to look forward to this great event with composure, and to say with *David*,
 “ though I walk through the valley of
 “ the

“ the shadow of death, I will fear no
 “ evil.”

By what means we may gain that happy state of mind which shall enable us to adopt this language, is an enquiry, in which we are all greatly interested, and which is worthy of our most serious attention. My design, in this discourse, is to give you all the satisfaction I am able on this important head, by suggesting to your thoughts some general directions, which, if properly observed, may enable you, in a great measure at least, to overcome the fear of death.

Now the first rule for obtaining a conquest over the fear of death, without a due attention to which all other rules will be of no avail, is this ; That we maintain a virtuous habit of mind, and course of life, and exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence,

fence, both towards God and towards man. If there be any natural and essential difference between virtue and vice; if there be a God who judgeth in the earth; those who have lived in the practice of impiety, injustice, or licentiousness in this world, can have no room to hope for happiness in that which is to come, and therefore can have no foundation for peace and comfort in death. "The sting of death is sin;" and nothing can take away this sting, but sincere repentance and actual reformation. Vicious men may possibly, indeed, obtain a temporary tranquility, by endeavouring to believe that there is no future state of rewards and punishments—no ruling power at the head of the universe, who will render to every man according to his works. Or they may for a time banish the thought of death, and all serious reflections, from their minds, by passing through a perpetual

tual round of amusement, dissipation, and sensual indulgence, and making themselves the slaves of intemperance. But after all, the ideas of religion and a future state will sometimes force themselves upon their minds; they will have some moments of bitter remembrance, and some painful forebodings of an hereafter. Or, however powerfully the opiate, which infidelity and licentiousness have prepared for them, may operate upon their minds, its effects cannot extend beyond this present life. For a while they may be lulled in fatal security; but they must at last awake, to meet the awful doom, which it hath been the study of their lives to forget. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He alone who lives virtuously, and so faithfully performs the several duties which are incumbent upon him, as to obtain the testimony of a good conscience, can die in peace, and commit himself

himself into the hands of his Maker, with a joyful expectation of his mercy unto eternal life. The righteous only hath hope in his death. The first and fundamental rule, then, in order to conquer the fear of death, is, to be sincerely virtuous and good. If this rule be observed, it will infallibly remove all the real grounds of fear, and give us sufficient reason to meet our last enemy without dismay. But that it will actually free us from all painful and distressing apprehensions of our latter end, is more than can be absolutely asserted. Many persons possessed of sincere and eminent piety and goodness, have "through fear of death been all their life - time subject to bondage." Having therefore laid the foundation of a peaceful death in a virtuous temper and character, it will be necessary that we proceed still farther: and,

Secondly,

Secondly, Make the idea of death familiar to our minds, by frequently considering our latter end. It may be laid down as a general maxim, to which we shall find but few exceptions, that ignorance is the parent of fear. It is because the inferior classes of mankind have few opportunities of acquainting themselves with the real nature of things, that we find them so ready to give credit to marvellous tales, and to terrify themselves with the apprehension of things, which only exist in fable and imagination. Where the empire of real knowledge increases, that of fear and credulity will always decline. And with regard to the object now under consideration, the more intimately we are acquainted with it, the less formidable it will appear. Many of the terrors with which it seems at present surrounded, upon a closer inspection would entirely vanish.

Let

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Let us, my brethren, for once take a nearer view of this object of dread, than we are generally willing to do; and examine what there is in it, which makes it of all terrible things the most terrible. Is it the bodily pain and sickness that attend it? These are by no means peculiar, nor indeed proper to death; for when death comes, pain is at an end. It is indeed generally preceded by some degree of pain; but this is very different in different persons according to the nature of their disorder; and it seems reasonable to suppose that, even at the worst, the last weak efforts of nature cannot be so painful, as when it struggles with a disease, while the constitution is in a more robust and vigorous state. The pains of death may possibly be, and frequently are, very inconsiderable; and we have no reason whatever to imagine, that they are, generally, at all equal with those which many persons

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sons endure, with great composure and fortitude, in the course of their lives.

Is it the gloomy apparatus of death, which terrifies you? Are the ideas of a ghastly visage, a faltering tongue, an expiring groan, a pale and breathless corpse, a coffin and a shroud, and last of all the dark and dismal tomb, terrible and shocking to your imagination? Remember that all these "are terrors to the living, not the dead." At that season, it will be a matter of no significance to us, what shall be the appearance of our bodies, how they shall be cloathed, or where they shall be deposited; for there is no knowledge or device in the grave whither we are going. Away then with such idle cares, and fantastical fears! They have no foundation in nature, and therefore ought not to disturb the repose of a wise man for a single moment.

Does

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Does your fear of death arise from an apprehension, lest it should be attended with some aggravating circumstances? Are you fearful lest your end should be sudden and unexpected; or lest it should be preceded by a long and tedious illness? Many persons have earnestly desired and prayed for the former; and many have greatly preferred the latter. Both have their advantages, and both their inconveniences. Why should you trouble yourself about a circumstance of so doubtful a nature? Leave it to be determined by him who ordereth all things well. Are you afraid of dying in a remote country, at a distance from your relations and friends? Consider, that, though in this case you would be deprived of an opportunity of taking your last farewell of your friends, and receiving their kind support and assistance; you would at the same time be excused from passing through the last tender parting

parting scene—a scene the most distressing to which human nature is subject—a scene which many persons of great sensibility have thought themselves incapable of enduring, and therefore have wished to avoid.

Many of the usual terrors of death appear then, upon examination, to be imaginary, or of very little moment. I do not say, however, that this is the case with them all. I do not say that death is to human nature no real evil. To assert this of an event, which dissolves the firmest friendships and the most endearing connections; which separates us for ever from all that is valuable and delightful in the present world; and which introduceth us into an unseen and untried state of being, requires a degree of stoical apathy, of which, I believe, few persons are capable. But this I will assert, that the way to prepare and strengthen our
minds

minds for this great event, is—not to turn away our eyes from the approaching enemy, but to stand our ground, observe his advances, and prepare ourselves for the combat. We should continually carry about with us the idea of death; in health as well as in sickness; in safety as well as in danger; in the seasons of cheerfulness and gaiety, as well as in the moments of solitude and reflection. By this means we shall acquire a familiarity with this king of terrors, which will enable us to observe him approaching towards us without consternation, and at last to obey his summons with a firm and undaunted mind. Nor will this intimacy with death in the least diminish the true enjoyment of life. It will give us that habitual tranquility of spirit, without which external objects are incapable of affording us delight; and will teach us to heighten the pleasures of life, by considering them

them as gifts which nature had not promised to bestow upon us, and which, before they came into our hands, we were not certain of enjoying.

To enable us to overcome the fear of death, we should likewise frequently reflect, thirdly, That this is a natural and unavoidable event, which is common to all the human race. The great law of nature is, “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;” and on the execution of this law depends the regular succession of life and enjoyment, and the harmony of this part of the creation. Why then should we wish to infringe a law, which the great author of nature hath wisely established for the general good? Ought we not rather cheerfully to submit to the appointment of the Being who made us; and to meet our own dissolution with the same composure, with
which

which a wise man once received the news of his son's death; who made no other reply to the message than this, "I knew that my son was mortal!" Besides, what can be more foolish and absurd, than to waste our time and destroy our happiness, in vain wishes for that which in the nature of things is impossible? If any calamities be proper objects of fear, they are such as are contingent, and either may or may not happen. But with regard to such as must necessarily come upon us, it is the dictate of wisdom, that we should calmly wait their approach, and endure them with all the fortitude we are able. Who are we, that we should murmur against the will of heaven, and complain of the common lot of mortality?

But I proceed to take notice of another much more important and effectual remedy against the fear of death,

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which

which is, fourthly, That we should preserve in our minds a lively conviction, and devout sense of the wise and righteous government of Almighty God, and chearfully resign ourselves and all our concerns to his direction. It was this pious confidence in the Supreme Being, which enabled David to conquer the fear of death. “ The
 “ Lord is my shepherd (saith he) I
 “ shall not want. He leadeth me in
 “ the paths of righteousness for his
 “ name’s sake. Yea, though I walk
 “ through the valley of the shadow of
 “ death, I will fear no evil : for thou
 “ art with me : thy rod, and thy staff,
 “ they comfort me.” And from the same source every good man may derive consolation, when his heart is oppressed with fearful apprehensions of his approaching dissolution. At such a season, he will find his noblest support in such reflections as these :

“ That this world and all its con-
 “ cerns

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“ cerns, are under the direction of a
 “ wise governor ; that all creatures
 “ throughout the universe are under
 “ the care of one almighty and graci-
 “ ous parent ; are delightful truths of
 “ which I have the clearest and most
 “ convincing evidence. All nature
 “ is full of the most illustrious displays
 “ of powerful agency, wise design, and
 “ unbounded benevolence. All na-
 “ ture, therefore, is full of God. In
 “ him all creatures live and move and
 “ have their being. Of his providen-
 “ tial care, and parental tenderness, I
 “ have had constant experience, ever
 “ since I came into the world. From
 “ him I derived all my animal, intel-
 “ lectual, and moral powers. In the
 “ helpless years of infancy and child-
 “ hood, his providence was my de-
 “ fence ; and through all the stages
 “ of my life his bounty hath supplied
 “ my wants, and given me richly all
 “ things to enjoy. He hath fed and

“ cloathed me all my life long to this
“ day, and hath crowned me with lov-
“ ing kindness and tender mercies.
“ Wherefore, then, should I fear to
“ obey the summons of that great and
“ good Being, who ruleth the world
“ in wisdom and righteousness?
“ Wherefore should I fear to follow
“ the guidance of my best friend, and
“ my almighty parent, even when he
“ leads me through the dark valley
“ of the shadow of death? Wherever
“ I go I shall still be in his presence;
“ I shall still be secure under his pro-
“ tection; I shall still be happy in his
“ favour. Why, then, art thou cast
“ down, O my soul? and why art
“ thou disquieted within me? hope
“ thou in God: for when my flesh
“ and my heart fail, he will be the
“ strength of my heart, and my por-
“ tion for ever.”

In the last place, it is necessary, in
order

order to our obtaining a complete and final conquest over the fear of death, that we should constantly look forward, with joyful expectation, to a state of perfect and endless felicity, in the life to come. The grounds of this expectation are laid in the frame and constitution of our nature, and in the present state of human affairs. In the former, we find an earnest desire of life, and longing after immortality, which we cannot suppose that our maker would have implanted within us, but with an intention that it should be gratified; and we are conscious of noble powers, which cannot be exercised in their full extent, or attain their utmost perfection, in this life. In the latter, we may observe an evident distinction between virtue and vice, and plain traces of a moral government; from whence we are naturally led to expect that the same wise plan of Providence, which is begun in this world,

will be continued and completed in another. And this delightful expectation is confirmed to us by the gospel of Jesus Christ ; whom the Almighty raised up to teach mankind the important doctrine of a future state, and to “ bring life and immortality to light ;” and hereby to “ deliver them who “ through fear of death are all their “ life time subject to bondage.” With what confidence then may the sincere and virtuous christian banish all distressing apprehensions of his dissolution from his mind ! With what joy and triumph may he say, Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ? O death where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory ; through our Lord Jesus Christ !

Under the influence of this blessed hope it was, that the great Saviour of mankind

mankind submitted himself patiently to the will of his enemies. In expectation of the joy which was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame. Animated by the same glorious prospect, the apostles and first disciples of Christ continued steadfast in the profession and practice of christianity, in the midst of difficulties and dangers. Their triumphant language was ; " We are troubled on every side, " yet not distressed ; perplexed, but " not in despair ; persecuted, but not " forsaken ; cast down, but not de- " stroyed. Though our outward man " perish, our inward man is renewed " day by day ; while we look, not at " the things which are seen and tem- " poral, but at the things which are " not seen and eternal. For we know " that if our earthly house of this ta- " bernacle be dissolved, we have a " building of God, a house not made " with hands, eternal in the heavens."

These noble principles and delightful expectations have supported good men in all ages of the world ; and have enabled many to meet death, in its most terrible forms, with serenity, and even with triumphant joy.

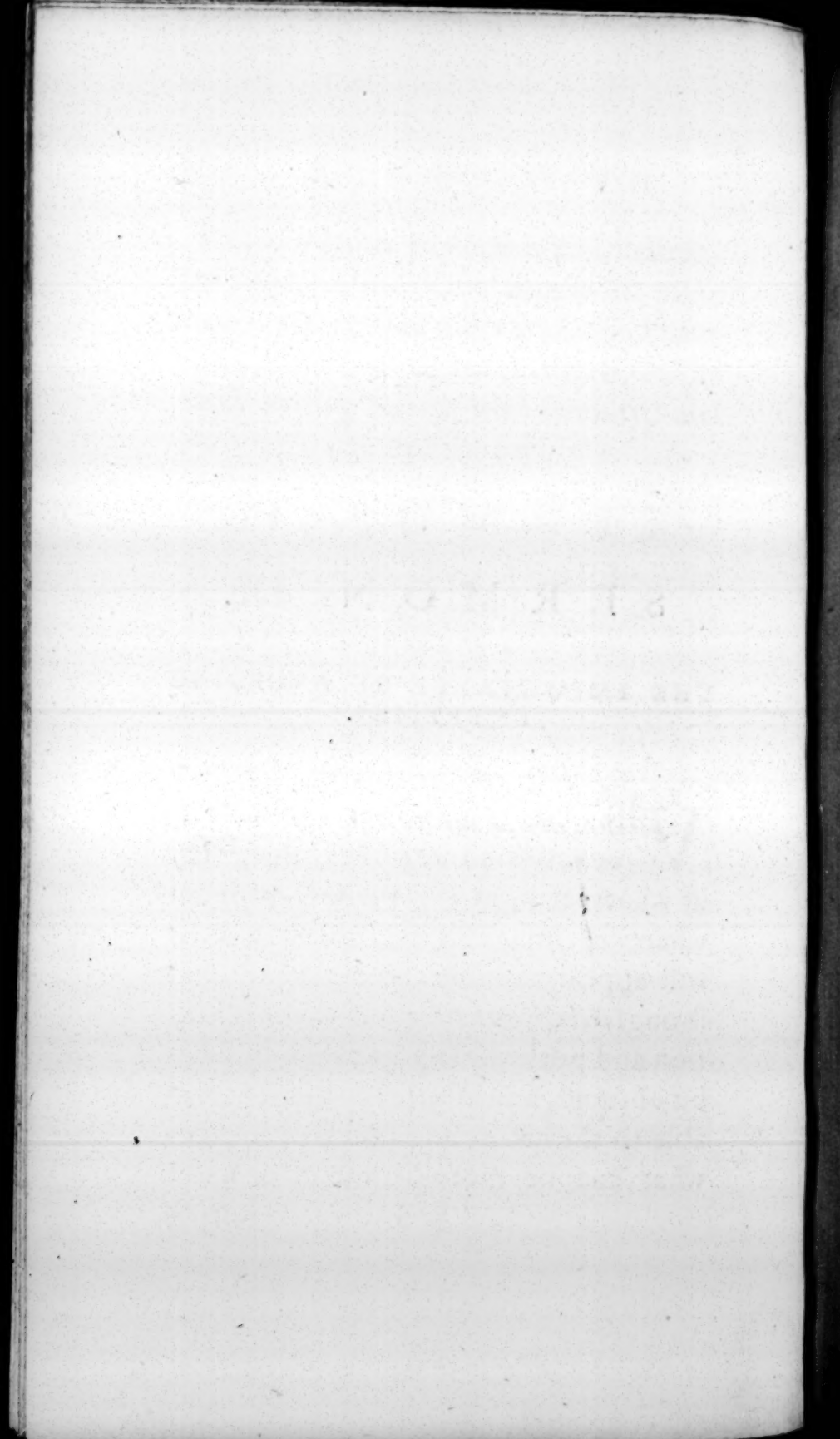
And the same virtuous character—the same religious principles—the same christian hopes—may enable us all to say, “ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.” Let us then, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord ; for as much as we know, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

S E R M O N IX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING EXTREMES.

*Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.*

HOR.



S E R M O N IX.

PROVERBS iv. 27.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.

VIRTUE is an object of such real beauty and intrinsic value, that in whatever light it is placed, or under whatever image it is represented, it will appear amiable and excellent, and strongly recommend itself to our affection and pursuit. If you define it, a habit of mind, and course of action, agreeable to the nature and fitness of things; what can be more desirable, or more worthy

worthy of praise, than, at all times, to be and to do that which our nature and situation requires? If you suppose it to consist in complying with the dictates of conscience, or following the moral feelings which are implanted in our nature; what can be more becoming or commendable, than to do that which cannot fail of ministering satisfaction to our own minds upon reflection, and which every man, whose moral sense is not totally depraved, must admire and applaud? If you call it obedience to the will and command of God; can any thing be more reasonable, than that we should regard the authority of that Being, on whom we continually depend for our existence; from whom we have received all our enjoyments, who is able to judge with unerring certainty concerning our true interest; and who enjoins upon us no other laws, than such as are of essential and evident importance to the

the perfection and happiness of our nature? Or lastly, if you represent virtue as a middle path, which lies between two extremes; in this view of the subject likewise, we shall find, upon examination, that there is a propriety, beauty, and excellence in a virtuous temper and character, which cannot fail of exciting our admiration and love.

Under this image it is, that virtue is represented in the text, and that I propose to consider it in the present discourse: in which it is my design to shew, by a variety of instances, the great importance of observing a due medium, and carefully avoiding extremes in the conduct of life; and thus to recommend to your practical regard the exhortation of the wise author of the book of Proverbs, “ turn
“ not to the right hand, nor to the
“ left; remove thy foot from evil.”

In

In the first place, we may consider the text as an exhortation to guard against the extremes of enthusiasm and superstition, on the one hand, and of irreligion and profaneness, on the other.

It appears from the history and the present state of the world, that these are extremes into which mankind are in great danger of falling. Mistaken and unworthy conceptions of the deity have, on the one hand, laid the foundation for that servile dread of his displeasure, and those ridiculous artifices to obtain his favour, which may properly be styled superstition. Men have first ascribed to the Almighty the passions and frailties of human nature, and imagined that he is "altogether such a one as themselves; and then, as might naturally be expected, have amused themselves with the idle hope of moving his pity, and winning his partiality,

ty, by the same methods, by which they ingratiate themselves into the affections of the weakest and most worthless of their fellow mortals. Hence the whole train of insignificant, burdensome, ridiculous and even immoral rites, which have been, at different periods, introduced into the world under the sanction of priestly authority, and have passed with the vulgar for religion.

On the other hand, there are not a few, who, having good sense enough to discern the folly and absurdity of superstitious opinions and practices, and resolution enough to shake off vulgar errors, and conquer the prejudices of education, have from hence proceeded to disregard and despise the sacred obligations of religion, and to treat all the instrumental duties of piety with neglect and contempt. They have persuaded themselves to consider a regard

gard to the providence and government of Almighty God, as a weakness proper to be encouraged only among the ignorant multitude; and to look upon public worship as nothing more than a useful wheel in the great machine of civil government, by which a more sacred veneration for the laws of order and morality is preserved in the minds of the vulgar. Or if they have not disavowed religion in speculation, they have deserted it in practice. Partly for want of paying sufficient attention to the evidence of the great principles of religion, which arises from the established constitution of nature and the general course of things; and partly through a weak and unmanly fear of being thought to fall in with vulgar prejudices; they either wholly neglect the duties of devotion, or perform them in such a manner as plainly to shew, that their religion is rather the effect of custom and example, than
of

of the rational conviction and deliberate judgment of their own minds. They retain so much of the form of religion, as a regard to decency, and to the inclinations and opinions of others requires; but with regard to the inward sentiments and warm emotions of genuine piety—these are things with which they meddle not.

Doth not the path of wisdom and of duty lie between these two extremes? Let the judgment of impartial reason, let the feelings of the honest heart, determine the question. Can any truths in nature be more evident than, that great effects must have an adequate cause; that where there are wise productions there must be a skilful agent; that where there is a profusion of happiness, there must be a kind benefactor; and, in a word, that where the work is magnificent, beautiful, and good, beyond description
or

or conception, the hand that made it must be divine? Are there any principles more deeply rooted in the human heart than these;—that unlimited power and authority should be contemplated with the highest veneration; that unerring wisdom is the proper object of admiration and confidence; that disinterested goodness ought to excite the warmest esteem and love; and that liberal acts of kindness call for chearful returns of gratitude? And how shall these sentiments, or any other pious disposition, be produced or strengthened in the mind, but by the frequent contemplation of the object towards which they are directed, and by solemn addresses to him in acts of religious worship? No habit can be confirmed, but by repeated acts; no sentiment can be established but by continual exercise. If therefore religion itself be rational, the instrumental duties of it must be so too.

And

And if it be a culpable extreme to conceive of our maker with enthusiastical gloom and terror, or to address him with superstitious formalities, it is a much greater fault to banish all religious principles from the mind, and to live “without God in the world.”

The advice of the text may likewise be of use to regulate our conduct in the pursuit and propagation of religious knowledge.

There are many subjects of debate, the determination of which is of little importance to the virtue or the happiness of mankind. And it would perhaps have been better for the world, if all such questions had been left in their natural state of indifference, and had not received an imaginary significance from the laborious attempts which have been made to explain
plain

plain them, and the warm contentions which have arisen concerning them. There are likewise many enquiries, attended with difficulties which it is scarcely possible to remove, and with respect to which, the utmost penetration, united with the most perfect impartiality, is incapable of giving us any tolerable degree of satisfaction. Yet, to such subjects as these, many have devoted their principal attention; in the pursuit of such speculations they have wasted their time, injured their temper, and neglected their own real improvement, and the service of mankind. The lowest censure which we can pass upon this manner of spending life is, to call it laborious idleness.

But because we see some men engaged in enquiries which are “unprofitable and vain;” or because we are convinced from observation and experience, that error and mistake are inseparable

rable from human nature; to infer from hence that all cultivation of the understanding is unnecessary, and that all researches after truth must be fruitless, would be unreasonable and absurd. Opinion has doubtless a powerful influence upon practice. Between the principles we entertain, and the course of life we pursue, there is the natural connection of cause and effect. Actions proceed from motives, and motives arise from opinion. Great care then should be taken, that our opinions are founded on reason and nature, and such as will lead to a wise and virtuous conduct. A man who has a clear conviction and lively sense of the fundamental truths of religion, as they are taught by reason and christianity, has the best security against the snares of vice, and the firmest foundation for the steady and uniform practice of virtue.

If

If therefore we ought not to perplex ourselves with enquiries which are beyond our reach, nor to waste our time in speculations which profit nothing; so neither, on the contrary, ought we (as seems to be too much the taste of the present times) to indulge an indolent indifference with respect to moral and religious truth, and to sit down contented, either with no fixed and rational principles at all, or, which nearly amounts to the same thing, with those which we derive, not from the free use of our own understandings, but from education, example, and authority. But, having satisfied ourselves, that the subjects of our enquiry are of real importance, and such as are capable of being in some good degree ascertained, we should seek for truth “as for silver, “and search for her, as for hidden “treasures.”

And

S E R M O N IX. 239

And the knowledge which we have thus acquired, we should be desirous of communicating to others. Our intellectual improvements, as well as all our other accomplishments and talents, should be devoted to the service of mankind. We should cheerfully embrace every opportunity, which our situation and profession in life affords us, of restraining the dominion of prejudice and error, and enlarging the empire of knowledge and wisdom in the world. To be unconcerned about the progress of important truth necessarily implies some degree of indifference to the cause of virtue, and to the best interests of mankind. As a wise man will lay up knowledge, "so a good man will bring forth out of his treasure things new and old."

But we should be careful lest our zeal for truth degenerate into bigotry,
and

and tempt us to trespass the bounds of moderation and charity. Now it doth this, when it leads us to forget our own fallibility, and to consider our own private opinions as demonstrable and incontestable principles, which all the world ought, without hesitation, to receive. Though we must always imagine, that we have reason and probability on the side of our opinions; yet we should never forget, that, after all our most diligent researches, they may possibly be against us. We should remember, that those who differ from us, are as much persuaded that their principles are well grounded, as we can possibly be that ours are so; and that other people have eyes as well as ourselves. Had this one plain truth been properly regarded, no man would ever have thought of imposing his opinions upon his neighbours, or of treating him with neglect, contempt, unkindness and inhumanity,

humanity, for no other reason but because he doth not see things in the same light with himself.

In this consists the very essence of uncharitableness. It doth not consist in thinking another person's opinions false, ridiculous, or even dangerous and destructive; for this may be the necessary consequence of a man's most deliberate and settled principles. It doth not consist in firmly adhering to our opinions; in zealously defending them, as occasion requires; or in endeavouring, by all fair and rational methods, to bring others to embrace the same system of faith with ourselves: for if a man apprehends his opinions to be of importance to mankind, he ought, without scruple, to avow them, and to do all in his power to establish them in the world. But the uncharitable man is one, who hath such an idea of the goodness of his

own understanding, and of the conclusiveness of his own reasonings, as to imagine that every one who differs from him, must do it either through indolence, partiality, or the influence of some vicious passion—must either have a weak head, or a bad heart. The uncharitable man is one who is capable of treating a person of amiable dispositions and unblemished reputation, with disrespect, of speaking concerning him in terms of ridicule or reproach, and of subjecting him to inconveniences and hardships—merely on account of his opinions.

This is a fault at least equally deserving of censure, with that indifference to truth, which was before described, and to which it stands opposed. In the middle way between these two extremes, lies that moderation and charity, which is much talked of; but little understood, and less practised. Let

us keep this middle path, and turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left, that we may remove our foot from evil.

But I proceed to observe, that this rule may be farther considered as respecting the duties of self government.

Mankind have differed widely in their practical judgment, concerning the ends for which the inferior appetites and passions were implanted in human nature by its great Author. It hath been the serious opinion of many, that they were only given us for the exercise and improvement of our virtue, and that it is our duty as much as possible to oppose and suppress them. To this opinion we may ascribe the penances and mortifications which have been practised in the church of Rome, and all those unnatural

tural and useless restraints, which many christians have honoured with the name of self-denial and poverty of spirit. But this is an error, into which none but the lowest and most illiterate, or the weakest and most enthusiastical part of mankind are in danger of falling. The opposite extreme is much more frequent, and I may add, much more fatal. Among all classes of men, there are not a few, who, having no relish for the superior pleasures of an improved understanding, a refined taste, active benevolence, and rational piety, place all their happiness in the indulgence of their animal appetites, and live for no higher end, than to riot upon the labours of others, and to waste and abuse the bounties of providence. Persons of this character apologize for their conduct to the world, and to their own hearts, by pleading that their passions were given them to be a source of happiness; and

and that the best way to express their gratitude to their Maker, 'is without restraint to partake of the rich fruits with which the garden of nature is furnished. They vindicate the most shameful excesses, by perverting a maxim, which, rightly understood, is full of wisdom and piety, that "to enjoy is to obey."

But neither rigid abstinence and mortification, on the one hand, nor the licentious and unrestrained indulgence of appetite, on the other, is consistent with the constitution of human nature, or the laws established by its great Author. Those who place christian perfection in restraining and counteracting, as much as possible, the inferior appetites and passions of our nature, forget that we are corporeal, and those who place all our happiness in animal indulgences, forget that we are spiritual beings. The former

M 3 foolishly

foolishly deny themselves many delights which they might innocently enjoy, and ungratefully refuse the cup of pleasure, though it be held out to them by the hand from whence cometh every good thing. The latter, with still greater folly, resign all the distinguishing honours and felicities of their reasonable nature, for the sake of the inferior gratifications of sense; and with still higher ingratitude, despise and reject the richest treasures which infinite goodness could bestow upon the sons of men—an enlightened understanding, virtuous affections, a peaceful conscience, and a blessed immortality.

The perfection of human wisdom and happiness consists in avoiding both these extremes, and neither, on the one hand, affecting a degree of superiority and indifference to the pleasures of animal life, which is incompatible

S E R M O N IX. 247

patible with our present nature and condition; nor on the other, neglecting those pursuits and enjoyments which our Maker hath evidently designed for our chief good: neither vainly aspiring to an equality with superior natures, nor basely sinking ourselves to a level with the brutal creation; but in all things “shewing ourselves
“men.”

In like manner, the precept of the text may farther serve to guard us against the extremes of excessive gaiety and levity of behaviour on the one hand, and a morose and fretful melancholy on the other. That light and giddy humour, which leads a man to make mirth and laughter the business of his life, and to treat the most important subjects with ridicule and buffoonery; how much soever it may attract the attention of the thoughtless, and the admiration of the vulgar, is

M 4 inconsistent

inconsistent with the character of a wise man, and unfavourable to the interests of virtue.

The business of human life is serious and important, and can be properly transacted only by a sedate and thoughtful mind. Much consideration is necessary to enable a man to establish in his own mind rational principles of action, and to form to himself a judicious and consistent plan for the conduct of life. The frequent and deliberate examination of our dispositions and manners, and serious reflections on the nature and tendency of our actions, are requisite to preserve us from being continually misled by specious appearances, and seduced by evil examples. Every man hath an understanding to cultivate and improve; virtuous dispositions and habits to form; some station and character in life to support and adorn;
important

important services to perform to the world ; homage and obedience to pay to his Maker ; and his own happiness, both in this life, and that which is to come, to secure. In such a situation, and with such obligations, how irrational, how unbecoming is it, to indulge an habitual levity and dissipation of temper, and to make a jest of life, and all its most important concerns. One may truly say of such laughter, " it is mad," and of such mirth, " what doth it ?"

To avoid this extreme, let us not, however, run into the opposite ; and to be wise and serious, become morose and gloomy. Our present situation, though interesting, is agreeable. As we have much business to transact, so we have many pleasures to enjoy. The table of nature is richly furnished with provision. The God of nature invites us to partake of the feast. Let us not

250 S E R M O N I X.

churlishly cast away the treasure which is put into our hands, or foolishly imagine, that to make ourselves miserable in this life, is the way to prepare ourselves for being happy in the next. While we faithfully endeavour to discharge the duties of life, let us banish all anxious care from our hearts, and forbidding gloom from our countenances, and indulge a rational and manly chearfulness of heart. If any man hath a right to be chearful, it is he whose heart condemns him not, and who hath confidence towards God. Let us then persevere in the path of wisdom rejoicing, for her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

I proceed, in the last place to observe, that the exhortation of the text may assist us in regulating our conduct in the connections of social life. And here, out of many other particulars
which

which might be mentioned, I will select the two following, that it may teach us how far our acts of kindness and generosity ought to extend, and how far a complying temper ought to be indulged.

In all stations of life, there are some men who are wholly under the dominion of covetous dispositions, and imagine that they have so many necessary demands for their wealth, that it is entirely out of their power to devote any part of it to the purposes of beneficence. They therefore think themselves excused from performing acts of liberality to their brethren in distress; and endeavour to persuade themselves, that nothing farther is required of them, than to observe their misfortunes with compassion, and to express their good wishes for their relief. Perhaps there is no instance, in which men more easily and more frequently

frequently impose upon themselves, than this.

On the contrary, there are some, who, from the overflowing of good nature and tenderness, give credit to every tale of sorrow, and lavish the gifts of charity on every object which has but the appearance of necessity. By this means, they are made the dupes of imposture and artifice, and frequently cast away that wealth upon improper and undeserving objects, which either ought to have been employed in answering the demands of justice, or might have been expended in relieving real indigence, and supporting humble and modest merit.

Both these extremes, though not equally culpable, nor equally common, ought however to be avoided. The path of duty, which lies in the middle way between them, is, to be always
ready

ready to distribute of our abundance to the necessities of our brethren, but to submit our liberality to the direction of equity and prudence.

Finally, the precept of the text may teach us, how far a complying temper ought to be indulged.—There are persons who seem to value themselves highly on a certain inflexibility of disposition, rudeness of speech, and severity of manner, which is exceedingly disagreeable and offensive to all with whom they are connected. With a positive and dogmatical air to declare their own opinions, on every occasion, without any regard to propriety, or any allowance for that difference of taste and sentiment which necessarily prevails in the world; warmly to oppose the opinions of others, merely for the sake of contradiction, without any prospect of doing good, or any sufficient motive whatever; to take a pride
in

in departing from established customs, and violating the usual forms of good breeding; and to make themselves ridiculous for the pleasure of being singular;—is, in the estimation of some, to possess a high degree of virtue and merit. An obstinate, uncomplying, and unsocial temper, passes with them for a laudable steadiness and resolution; incivility and rudeness for honest simplicity; and conceit and ill-nature for sincerity and plain dealing.

There are multitudes, on the contrary, who pay so much attention to the opinions and inclinations of others, that they have no judgment or will of their own. They have too much complaisance to think of contradicting any man's assertions, and too much good-nature to be capable of refusing any man's requests. They have no settled principles—no uniform and consistent character—but change their
opinions

opinions and behaviour, as often as they change their company and connections. This unmanly weakness and fickleness of temper, is at once contemptible and dangerous. It often betrays a man into the most ridiculous inconsistencies, and even into the most culpable improprieties of conduct.

The true medium between these extremes, lies in complying with the opinions and customs of the world as far as is consistent with integrity and prudence; in being always courteous and obliging, but never servilely submissive to the humours of others; in making it a secondary object of attention, to please others, but the first and principal, to satisfy our own minds by invariably adhering to that which we judge to be right.

On the whole, from what hath been said it appears, that the precept of the
text

text is capable of directing our conduct in the most important duties of life, and is therefore worthy of our most constant and serious regard.

On either side, thou seest a thousand bye-paths which lead to remorse, disgrace and ruin. But turn not to the right hand nor to the left ; for before thee there lies one middle path, the path of the just, which is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day :—walk therein, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul.

Which may God grant unto us all !
Amen.

S E R M O N X.

ON REJOICING WITH THEM THAT
REJOICE.

———*Latabitur amici letitiâ æque ac sua.*

Cic.

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S E R M O N X.

ROMANS XII. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice.

THERE is not a duty in the whole circle of morals, which, at first view, appears more evidently to have its foundation in nature and reason, or which a generous mind will find itself more strongly inclined to perform;—there is not a precept of the gospel more plainly agreeable to the general design and spirit of our holy religion, or more worthy of the attentive and practical regard of all who call themselves

themselves christians—than that of the text. Is it not then a just ground of surprize, that this branch of morality has been taken so little notice of even by those who have treated the subject of morals as a science, and attempted to class the several virtues under their proper heads, that no precise and particular term hath yet been affixed to it? That benevolent affection of the mind, which disposes a man to interest himself in the concerns of others, and to partake both of their joys and their sorrows, philosophers have stiled *sympathy*. And that species of this benevolent affection which respects the calamities and distresses of mankind, is in common language, called *pity* or *compassion*. But that species of it, which hath for its object the prosperity and happiness of others, and consists in rejoicing with them that rejoice, hath been hitherto without a name. Is it not still more surprizing, that this christian

christian precept, which requires the exercise of disinterested benevolence in one of its most delightful branches, should have been so generally overlooked by the teachers of that religion whose characteristic is love, as seldom to have been directly insisted upon as a subject of public discourse?

This duty has not, I trust, been so much neglected in practice, as it has been disregarded in theory. The hearts of multitudes do, I doubt not, bear them witness, that they understand the full import of the apostolic injunction in the text, and that it is one of the chief sources of their happiness to obey it. Nevertheless, while selfishness and avarice, and their natural offspring envy, remain in the world, it cannot be unseasonable or improper, to counteract their influence, and cast some weight into the opposite scale of generosity and benevolence, by inculcating

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cating upon mankind the observance of this precept, and exhorting them to "rejoice with them that do rejoice."

To explain the nature, and recommend the practice of the duty enjoined in these words shall therefore be the business of the present discourse.

To "rejoice with them that do rejoice" is, in general, to have so much generosity of disposition, and sensibility of heart, as to be able to derive satisfaction and pleasure from observing the happiness of others. It requires a much greater share of benevolence, and a much higher degree of virtue, than are barely sufficient to preserve us from envy. To obey the precept of the text, it is not enough that we can behold the possessions of our neighbour without being discontented with our own; like *Abab*, who, when he could not obtain the inheritance of *Naboth*, went home to his house heavy

vy and displeased;—it is not enough, that we have not so much ambition or malevolence as to be incapable of enjoying the honours and pleasures which lie within our reach, because we observe others around us richer and greater than ourselves; like *Haman*, who, in the midst of all the wealth and power conferred upon him by king *Abasuerus*, said, “All this a-
 “vaileth me nothing, so long as I see
 “*Mordecai* the Jew sitting at the
 “king’s gate.” If we would “rejoice
 “with them that rejoice,” we must not only banish from our hearts all fretfulness, discontent and envy, but must cherish that refined and elevated philanthropy, which will incline us to interest ourselves in the concerns, and participate the pleasures of all our fellow creatures.

More particularly to explain the nature of this duty, let us suppose the
 apostle,

apostle, full of the sentiment of the text, addressing his christian brethren in some such language as this :

‘ You call yourselves, my brethren,
‘ disciples of a master, who requires
‘ that you should be distinguished
‘ from the rest of the world, by the
‘ exercise of the most extensive and
‘ ardent benevolence—who hath given
‘ you commandment, that ye should
‘ love one another. Manifest that you
‘ are indeed animated by this sacred
‘ principle, by habitually cherishing an
‘ affectionate attention to the interests
‘ of others; and particularly by re-
‘ joicing in every prosperous event
‘ which befalls them, and in every cir-
‘ cumstance which contributes to their
‘ happiness. When you see others
‘ possessed of wealth, which enables
‘ them to command the pleasures of
‘ sense, and of power, which secures
‘ them respect and subjection, and en-
‘ larges

‘ enlarges the sphere of their usefulness ;
 ‘ as far as you apprehend these exter-
 ‘ nal circumstances to be conducive to
 ‘ their real welfare, rejoice in their
 ‘ prosperity, and exercise that benevo-
 ‘ lence, which, without diminishing
 ‘ their property, or interfering with
 ‘ their enjoyment, will give you some
 ‘ share in their possessions.

‘ If your neighbour is, on a sudden,
 ‘ by some unexpected incident, raised
 ‘ from a state of obscurity and depen-
 ‘ dence to ease and affluence ; instead
 ‘ of complaining of the partial and
 ‘ unequal distribution of the good
 ‘ things of life ; instead of being afflict-
 ‘ ed, when another “ is made rich, and
 ‘ “ the glory of his house is increased,”
 ‘ because the same good fortune has not
 ‘ happened to yourselves ; let some of the
 ‘ rays of joy, which brighten your neigh-
 ‘ bour’s countenance on the change
 ‘ which has taken place in his condi-
 VOL. II. N tion

‘ tion, be reflected to yours; let the
‘ event which hath so greatly increased
‘ his happiness, make some addition
‘ to your own.

‘ Is your friend rescued from some
‘ great and imminent danger; recovered
‘ from threatening sickness to the free
‘ use of his active powers and the full
‘ enjoyment of life; saved from the as-
‘ faults of violence, or the still more
‘ dangerous attacks of treachery, de-
‘ ceit, or slander; arrived at the pos-
‘ session of some favourite object of
‘ his pursuit; rejoicing in the accom-
‘ plishment of some important design,
‘ or, in a word, elated with pleasure
‘ by the removal of any affliction, or
‘ the acquisition of any enjoyment?
‘ Let your bosom glow with those
‘ generous emotions, which are the
‘ natural fruits of genuine friendship,
‘ and the best proofs of its sincerity.
‘ And let your joy be expressed, not
‘ merely

‘ merely by the cold congratulations
 ‘ of customary complaisance, or by par-
 ‘ taking in those festive revellings in
 ‘ which the gratification of appetite
 ‘ may possibly be mistaken for the in-
 ‘ dulgence of benevolent affections,
 ‘ but by unconstrained chearfulness of
 ‘ aspect and language, and assiduous
 ‘ endeavours to perpetuate and increase
 ‘ the happiness of your friend.

‘ When you visit the habitation of
 ‘ honest and industrious poverty; if
 ‘ you find content and satisfaction—
 ‘ where perhaps you least expected to
 ‘ see them—in the obscure and lowly
 ‘ cottage; if you see a virtuous family
 ‘ met together around their common
 ‘ table, and partaking, with chearful
 ‘ countenances and grateful hearts,
 ‘ of the plain but sweet repast which
 ‘ their labour hath procured; if you
 ‘ hear the fond parents expressing in
 ‘ artless language their affection for

‘ their offspring, and declaring them-
 ‘ selves more happy in seeing them
 ‘ possessed of healthful constitutions,
 ‘ acquiring habits of industry and vir-
 ‘ tue, and adorned with simplicity of
 ‘ manners, than if they were raised to
 ‘ all the envied distinctions of wealth
 ‘ and power:—let not the weakness
 ‘ of pride incline you to despise their
 ‘ obscure and “homely joys,” or to
 ‘ hear the simple tale of their happiness
 ‘ with a disdainful smile:” leave for a
 ‘ while the artificial delights of refined
 ‘ and polished life, to participate, by a
 ‘ generous sympathy, the unadulterat-
 ‘ ed pleasures of nature:—whatever
 ‘ fashion or vanity may whisper to the
 ‘ contrary, you will be no losers by the
 ‘ exchange.’

‘ If you see others possessed of de-
 ‘ grees of knowledge, wisdom, and
 ‘ virtue, which enable and dispose
 ‘ them to be eminently useful to the
 ‘ world;

' world; though the lustre of their
 ' characters may somewhat eclipse
 ' your own, grudge them not the
 ' share of reputation and esteem which
 ' is their due, nor suffer their su-
 ' perior merit to produce any other
 ' emotions in your minds, than those
 ' of virtuous emulation and joy. Let
 ' your love of virtue be pure and un-
 ' mixed, and your love of mankind
 ' generous and disinterested; and, un-
 ' der the united influence of these
 ' principles, rejoice in every successful
 ' attempt to assist the progress of the
 ' former, and increase the happiness of
 ' the latter, from whatever quarter it
 ' comes. Provided these great ends
 ' be accomplished, esteem it a matter
 ' comparatively of little consequence,
 ' whether the instruments employed
 ' by providence for this purpose be
 ' yourselves or others. In this respect
 ' imitate the conduct of *Moses*, who,
 ' being told that the spirit of the Lord

‘ was come upon many of the elders of
‘ *Israel*, and that they prophesied, and
‘ being urged by some of his attendants
‘ to restrain and forbid them, made
‘ this generous and spirited reply ;
“ Enviest thou for my sake ? Would
“ God, that all the Lord’s people were
“ prophets, and that the Lord would
“ put his spirit upon them.”

‘ Let your satisfaction and joy in
‘ the happiness of others extend be-
‘ yond the little circle of your person-
‘ al connections, and be increased by
‘ every prosperous event, and every
‘ agreeable scene which comes under
‘ your notice. If in private families
‘ or in the larger societies which are
‘ formed among mankind, you observe
‘ brethren dwelling together in unity,
‘ and enjoying all the civil or religi-
‘ ous advantages which these associati-
‘ ons are designed to produce ; if you
‘ see your country blessed with peace,
‘ liberty

' liberty and equal government, en-
 ' riched with the treasures of com-
 ' merce, and improving in all the arts
 ' which adorn and polish human soci-
 ' ety; if you have reason to conclude,
 ' that useful knowledge is encouraged
 ' and promoted, that the spirit of
 ' christian charity is daily gaining
 ' ground, and that pure religion and
 ' genuine christianity have a multitude
 ' of steady votaries and zealous advo-
 ' cates, in the age and place in which
 ' you live; congratulate yourselves
 ' and your fellow citizens on the pub-
 ' lic prosperity and happiness; and cul-
 ' tivate, and express on every proper
 ' occasion, that patriotism and public
 ' spirit, which animated the heart of
 ' *David*, when he prayed that he
 ' might "rejoice in the gladness of
 " his nation," and when he "prefer-
 " red *Jerusalem* to his chief joy." Nor
 ' let your benevolence be limited by
 ' the boundaries of the country where

‘ you happen to be born, or confined
‘ to the community to which you are
‘ immediately related. As becomes
‘ citizens of the world, let your love
‘ of your country be exalted and im-
‘ proved into universal philanthropy;
‘ rejoice in every event which tends
‘ to the advantage and happiness of
‘ any part of your species; and since
‘ you are *men*, think nothing unde-
‘ serving of your notice, in which the
‘ welfare of *mankind* is concerned.

‘ Finally, behold with benevolent
‘ delight the various degrees of happi-
‘ ness, which are enjoyed by the feve-
‘ ral orders of beings which inhabit
‘ this earth, and which people the va-
‘ rious parts of that vast empire, over
‘ which the Lord God omnipotent
‘ reigneth. Observe the rich provisi-
‘ on which is made for the preservati-
‘ on and pleasure of the numerous
‘ tribes of animals which dwell upon
‘ the

‘ the face of the earth. Listen to the
‘ various natural expressions of chear-
‘ fulness and joy, by which every crea-
‘ ture manifests its enjoyment of life,
‘ and shews forth its maker’s praise.
‘ Let your imaginations, aided by the
‘ discoveries of philosophy, ascend to
‘ distant worlds, dispersed in regular
‘ order, through the boundless regions
‘ of space, and peopled by an infinite
‘ variety of beings, all possessed of
‘ powers for perception, action, and
‘ enjoyment—all, in different ways,
‘ capable of happiness. Let your
‘ faith, directed by revelation, visit
‘ that heaven which will be the ever-
‘ lasting habitation of “just men made
“ perfect;” and contemplate those joys
“ which eye hath not seen, nor ear
“ heard, and which it hath not entered
“ into the heart of man to conceive.”
‘ And while you thus survey the fruits
‘ of that liberality which makes the
‘ whole creation happy, as becomes

‘ children of the great father of all, re-
 ‘ joice in the felicity of his numerous
 ‘ offspring, and unite with all your
 ‘ brethren in heaven and earth, in
 ‘ giving thanks to him, who is “good
 “ to all, and whose tender mercies are
 “ over all his works.”

Such, my brethren, is the nature
 and extent of the duty enjoined in
 the text; such the import of the ex-
 hortation, “rejoice with them that
 “do rejoice.” To the feelings of every
 heart that is capable of friendship and
 benevolence I appeal, to determine
 whether this duty hath not its foun-
 dation in nature; whether it is not a
 source of the most refined pleasure
 which the human heart can enjoy.

That there is a principle in the mind
 of man which prompts him to look
 beyond himself and his own concerns,
 and to be attentive to the interests of
 others,

others, experience sufficiently attests. "No man" who lives according to reason, "liveth unto himself." It is a dictate of uncorrupted nature, as well as a law of revelation, that we should "love our neighbour as ourselves." Now, where this natural principle is suffered to operate in its full force—where this sacred law is obeyed in its utmost extent—we shall see the evident expressions of a chearful participation in the happiness of others, no less than of a cordial sympathy in their distresses. While the latter is discovered by down-cast looks, tender sighs, unaffected tears, and unsolicited offices of humanity and kindness; the former is no less plainly manifested by the aspect of chearfulness, by the language of congratulation, and by active endeavours to increase the happiness of "them that rejoice." The one is as much the natural effect of generosity and benevolence as the other; and both
are

are necessary to finish the character of a good man.

The duty enjoined in the text is, moreover, agreeable to that comprehensive and fundamental rule of equity, that “we should do unto others, “as we would that they should do “unto us.” When we feel our hearts elated to an unusual pitch of gladness, by some fortunate occurrence, we naturally look around us for some friend to whom we may communicate our joy; and the richest blessings which heaven could bestow upon us would lose more than half their value, if we had no companion to observe and share in our happiness. We do not love solitary pleasures. Even the common gifts of nature owe much of their sweetness to society; and we eat our daily bread with double relish, when those whom we love partake of the repast. The heart of man wants
some

some object to whom it may communicate its feelings, and can have no complete enjoyment without participation. We depend, in a great measure, upon the sensibility and benevolence of others for our happiness. Let us not forget, that others, in like manner, depend upon us. If we wish to see our friends interest themselves in our prosperity, let us not be inattentive or indifferent to theirs.

The practice of this virtue is productive of pleasures, with which those whose happiness centers in themselves "intermeddle not." While selfishness, accustomed to contemplate only such objects as lie within the narrow circle of her own possessions, is incapable of discerning the beautiful prospects which surround her on every side; while envy extracts the poison of discontent and fretfulness from the sweetest flowers which grow in the garden

garden of her neighbour; benevolence, like the industrious bee, which chearfully roves through the wilds of nature, and gathers honey wherever it is to be found, derives pleasure from every scene of happiness which she beholds.—Benevolence is of all others the most fruitful source of enjoyment. Even when it leads us to share the afflictions of others, the tender emotions of compassion, though necessarily productive of pain, are at the same time accompanied by a calm self-complacence, and heartfelt satisfaction, that greatly outweigh all the uneasy sensations which the sight of misery must always create in the hearts of the humane. Even when humanity receives the deepest wounds, and bursts forth in floods of sympathetic tears; the good man wishes not to part with his tender feelings, nor thinks it hard that nature obliges him to bear another's burden, as well as his

his own. Now, if even the sorrows of benevolence are attended with pleasure, what shall we say of its joys? If it be a good thing, to “weep with them that weep;” how “good and how pleasant” must it be, to “re-joice with them that rejoice!”

It is only by the cultivation of this temper, and the performance of this duty, that we can be qualified to enjoy the pleasures, and to discharge the offices, of virtuous friendship. This sacred union can only subsist between such as are under the habitual influence of the social and generous affections, and are capable of partaking in each others concerns with mutual sympathy. An interchange of ideas, and community of sentiments, is the chief source of the pleasures of friendship, and is indeed essential to its very existence. It is a gentle flame, which the damps of insensibility will always extin-

extinguish; it is a tender flower, which will never flourish in the cold and barren soil of selfishness and avarice. No man can deserve the honourable title of a true friend, who is not able to interest himself in every event, whether prosperous or distressing, which happens to his friend. It is not enough that, on great occasions, when he is oppressed with some grievous misfortunes, he exerts himself for his relief. To do this is humanity and compassion, but is not of itself sufficient to merit the appellation of friendship. Between true friends, there is that cordial and intimate attachment, which leads each party to consider every incident which affects the happiness of the other, in the light of importance; and which finds reciprocal pleasure or pain, in circumstances which the rest of the world observe with indifference. It is, therefore, necessary that a true friend should possess

selfs the temper we are recommending, in a degree of refinement unknown to many who make great pretensions, and perhaps have some claim, to benevolence.

The cultivation of the temper required in the text, is likewise a natural preparation for the exercise of that branch of benevolence to which it stands opposed—compassion. A man who has no lively perceptions of the happiness of others, will not be greatly afflicted when he sees it interrupted or destroyed; for it is only in proportion to our apprehension of the value of an object, that we are affected by the loss of it. To prepare and dispose us for the exercise of humanity towards our brethren in distress, it is necessary that we should accustom ourselves to take part in the prosperous events which befall them. This will inure the mind to go, as it were, out of itself, and render

render it susceptible of impressions from other events than those which immediately respect its own concerns. Having been long attentive to the happiness of others, it will be a natural and easy transition to take notice of their misfortunes. He, therefore, who "rejoices with them that rejoice," is best prepared to "weep with them that weep."

I add, this temper is highly favourable to the interests of piety, and has a natural tendency to awaken and cherish the principles of religious gratitude and joy. To the man who is blessed with this disposition, every object around him appears in a chearful and pleasing light, and the face of nature wears a perpetual smile. Attentive to the happiness of others, as well as sensible of his own, he has continually in his view a variety of proofs of the divine beneficence, unobserved by the selfish

selfish and envious man. While he sees his friends, his country, and the whole human race possessed of various sources of enjoyment;—while he observes the animal creation constantly supported, and liberally fed from the table of nature; while he extends his views to distant worlds and conceives of various orders of beings, who all, according to their capacity and rank, enjoy their existence; at the same time that he congratulates their felicity, he cannot fail of directing his thoughts to the great Giver of all good, deriving the highest satisfaction and joy from the contemplation of the divine government, and adopting the grateful sentiments and animated language of the Psalmist: “ The Lord hath
 “ prepared his throne in the heavens,
 “ and his kingdom ruleth over all:
 “ bless the Lord, ye his angels that
 “ excel in strength, that do his com-
 “ mandments, hearkening to the voice
 “ of

“ of his word : bless the Lord all ye
 “ his hosts, ye ministers of his that do
 “ his pleasure : bless the Lord all his
 “ works in all places of his dominion :
 “ bless the Lord, O my soul.”

Lastly, by cultivating and exercising
 this temper on earth, we shall most
 effectually qualify ourselves for engag-
 ing in the employments, and enjoying
 the happiness of the life to come. In
 the holy scriptures we are instructed,
 that the righteous will hereafter be
 exempted from every kind of evil,
 and put into the possession of perfect
 and endless felicity. We are there as-
 sured, that “ God will wipe all tears
 “ from their eyes, and that there shall
 “ be no more death, neither sorrow,
 “ nor crying, nor any more pain.” In
 the future state, therefore, having no
 objects of distress before our eyes, we
 shall have no room for the exercise of
 compassion. But for the disposition
 recom-

recommended in the text, we shall find constant and most delightful employment. The happy condition of all our kindred spirits, and of every being around us, will furnish us with continual occasions of joy. If therefore we cultivate this temper in the present life, by taking pleasure in every scene of happiness which comes under our notice, our minds will be in a proper state for the most pleasing exercise of the noblest affection of the human heart, when we shall become inhabitants of a world which will furnish us with inexhaustible sources of social delight; and throughout eternal ages we shall “rejoice with them that rejoice.”

Excited by these considerations, let us, my brethren, pay a constant and chearful attention to the precept of the text. Let every appearance of happiness in the world, around us, become

come to us an occasion of rejoicing. And to evince the sincerity of our benevolence, let us exert our utmost endeavours to continue and advance the happiness of our brethren. Instead of interrupting their enjoyment of life, by peevishness and fretfulness, slander and detraction, fraud and injustice, or violence and oppression, let us live in the practice of all those virtues, which conduce to the order and welfare of society.

To conclude, let us manifest that our "love is without dissimulation," and that we indeed "rejoice with them that rejoice," by "doing good unto all men as we have opportunity."

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XI.

ON PERFECTION.

Nil actum reputant, si quid superesset agendum.

LUCAN.

OF THE

STERN

ON PERFECTION

THE

S E R M O N XI.

2 COR. xiii. 11.

BE PERFECT.

EVERY man professes himself an admirer of virtue; every man acknowledges that it is the highest ornament and the only true happiness of human nature. Why then is not every man sincerely and eminently virtuous? Wherefore is it, that men's avowed principles and daily practice so often disagree?

For this surprizing appearance in the moral world many reasons might be assigned. Of these it is, perhaps, one of the principal, that men content

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them-

themselves with general and confused ideas of the nature of virtue, without paying a particular attention to the various forms it assumes, in the several relations and conditions of human life ; and that, in consequence of this, they are destitute of those elevated conceptions, and that refinement in moral taste, which must be the foundation of all distinguished excellence of character.

A man can no more expect to excel in the art of living a wise and virtuous life, without making himself well acquainted with the laws of virtue, and with the most finished characters which have been exhibited before the world ; than he could expect at once to commence a finished poet or painter, without taking pains to acquire a thorough knowledge of the principles of his art, and to improve his taste by studying the works of the most eminent

nent masters. As in the fine arts, a surprizing genius may sometimes arise, who, by the unassisted efforts of nature, without labour or instruction, shall send forth finished productions which shall astonish the world; so it may sometimes happen, that a person, naturally possessed of uncommon sweetness of temper and greatness of soul, shall at once rise to an eminence in virtue, which others shall admire and applaud, but with their utmost endeavours shall never be able to attain. But in general, it is no less true with respect to virtuous habits, than with regard to other ornamental accomplishments, that they can only be acquired in an eminent degree, by repeated exercise and constant labour.

The observation of an eminent master in painting, "that there is no easy method of becoming a good painter," may be applied to morals; and it may

with equal truth be asserted, that there is no easy method of becoming a good man. In both cases a very unfinished and imperfect performance may serve to please a vulgar and unimproved taste, but they are only such productions as are judiciously designed, and well executed, which can gain the approbation of those who, “ by reason
“ of use, have their senses exercised to
“ discern between good and evil.”

It is therefore of great importance, if we be desirous of excelling in all moral accomplishments, that we should form a clear idea of the nature of virtue in its several branches; that we should acquire a taste for what is beautiful and excellent in human characters; and that we should learn to distinguish between that degree of goodness which is low and imperfect, and that which is refined and exalted. In execution, we never go beyond, and seldom rise
up

up to the idea we had previously formed. If we would be great in act, we must first be great in thought. No man will ever excel in virtue, who does not fix his standard above the common level ;—who does not clearly discern wherein the utmost perfection of human nature consists, and earnestly desire to attain it.

With a view therefore to assist you in forming exalted conceptions of virtue, and to inspire you with a laudable ambition of rising to distinguished eminence of character, I shall, at this time, endeavour to exhibit before you the picture of a perfect man, and to persuade you constantly to keep in view, though it be impossible fully to obey, the precept of the text, “ be perfect.”

As the foundation of all that is great and excellent in the character of

THE PERFECT MAN, his mind is furnished with just and rational principles and maxims of conduct, and his heart is enriched with manly, generous and exalted sentiments.

Having, by a careful examination of the operations of his own mind, and the general constitution of human nature, formed a just estimate of human happiness, and of the intrinsic and comparative value of the several objects which invite our attention; he from his heart prefers the pleasures of reason and virtue to those of sense and appetite, and is disposed, whenever they interfere, to sacrifice the latter to the former. It is his fixed opinion, formed upon attentive observation and mature reflection, that a being constituted and situated like man, can be perfect and happy only in proportion as he improves his understanding, cultivates virtuous habits, and employs himself

himself in laudable and useful pursuits. He is therefore careful to preserve his moral discernment quick and lively, and his moral feelings strong and vigorous. He discovers proprieties or improprieties, beauties or blemishes, in moral conduct, which less accurate observers would have passed by without notice. His ideas of the nature and excellence of virtue being raised above the common standard, he feels a degree of satisfaction and pleasure in the performance of his duty, and in the consciousness of upright intentions, of which less cultivated minds are not susceptible. His conscience, though not weakly and superstitiously scrupulous, has that degree of sensibility and tenderness, which is the best guard against temptation, and the most powerful incentive to virtue.

By considering the general constitution

tion of the world, and the established order of nature, he gains a rational conviction that there is a powerful wise and good Being, from whom all things proceed, and by whom all the concerns of the universe are directed; that he is the proper object of supreme veneration, gratitude and love; that to observe the laws of virtue is to obey his will; and that he will not suffer sincere and persevering virtue to go without its reward. Under the influence of these principles, he is possessed of that rational but fervent piety, which consists in an habitual reverence for the perfections, and regard to the providence of God, a grateful sense of his manifold mercies, a patient acquiescence in his appointments, and a cordial subjection to his authority. These pious sentiments reside, not as occasional guests, but as constant inhabitants in his soul; they animate
all

all his devotions, and influence all his actions.

The perfect man is, moreover, continually inspired and animated with the warmest benevolence towards his fellow-creatures. His enlarged soul disdains to be confined within the narrow circle of his own concerns, and to be under the dominion of sordid and selfish principles. His sympathizing heart interests itself in the pleasures and pains of all around him, and prompts him to regard the welfare of others as his own. If his neighbour rejoices, he is happy; if his neighbour is afflicted, he mourns. He feels an ardent glow of benevolence, which no distinction of sects, no difference of opinion, no opposition of interests, can extinguish or abate. Every man, of every country, of every religion, of every character, he considers as his neighbour; and in this extensive sense

of the word, he "loves his neighbour
"as himself."

Finally, the perfect man, observing the extent and variety of the powers of human nature, the desire of immortality which is common to the whole human race, and those appearances of moral government which are discoverable in the present state of things; and above all, receiving the doctrine of christianity on this head as the voice of God to man; entertains a delightful persuasion of a future life, and performs his duty, not merely with a view to the present advantages of virtue, but likewise in expectation of an everlasting recompence of reward.

These exalted principles and sentiments, a love of virtue, a benevolent attention to the interests of others, and a regard to the life to come, bear a constant and uninterrupted sway in
his

his breast. To these his love of applause, his desire of ease and indulgence, his attachment to the pleasures of sense, and every other appetite, passion and pursuit is subordinate. Such is the heart of the perfect man.

Let us now examine the superstructure which is erected on this foundation, and take notice of the influence of these principles and sentiments, on his conduct in life.

And first, the perfect man observes and acknowledges the hand of Divine Providence in all the events which befall him; maintains an habitual regard to the presence and authority of Almighty God; and, in every relation and circumstance of life, does those things which are pleasing in his sight. He pays that tribute of homage, gratitude, and subjection to the Supreme Being, both in private and public acts of worship,

worship, which he apprehends to be due to the Creator and Governor of men ; and in all his devotions, he worships his Maker in spirit and in truth.

Moreover, as becomes a being, endowed with capacities for enquiring after truth, he applies himself diligently to the cultivation of his understanding, and lays aside as much as possible, all partiality and prejudice in his enquiries. As becomes a being, who hath nobler objects to pursue, - and higher pleasures to enjoy, than those of sense, he preserves all the appetites of animal nature under proper regulation, and never indulges them in a manner inconsistent with the higher obligations of integrity, benevolence and religion. As becomes a being to whom reason is given as the guide of his actions, he never suffers even the greatest affronts and injuries to awaken malicious and revengeful passions in his breast,
or

or to provoke him to undue resentment. He will take no farther notice of his most inveterate and implacable enemies, than his own immediate security, or the public safety, absolutely requires; for it is a maxim with him that "it is a glory to a man to pass by
" a transgression."

In all the relations of domestic and social life, the perfect man will "do
" unto others, as he would that they
" should do unto him." In the family to which he belongs, he will consult the peace and happiness of his relatives and dependents no less than his own, and will behave towards them with such fidelity and kindness, as will deserve and secure their esteem. In the transactions of business, he is directed, not by the prevailing customs of the world, but by a strict regard to the principles of honour and equity. Not the most certain and alluring prospect of gain,
not

not the most powerful temptation which can be presented before him, will ever prevail upon him to do that which he apprehends to be in any respect unjust or dishonourable.

The goodness of his heart, moreover, discovers itself in a constant series of beneficent actions. To relieve the indigent, and heal the sick; to minister consolation to the dejected and sorrowful spirit; to encourage and assist the honest and industrious poor; to rescue the oppressed out of the hands of the oppressor; to call forth modest merit out of the vale of obscurity; to give wholesome instruction and advice to the unexperienced and inconsiderate; to perform the generous and tender offices of disinterested friendship; to assist the progress of knowledge, encourage useful undertakings, and support the cause of liberty, virtue and religion in the world; these

these are the noble, the godlike designs, which the perfect man delights to pursue—which, according to his abilities and opportunities, he lives to accomplish. Not satisfied with that low degree of goodness, which consists in refraining from acts of injustice or fraud, from evil-speaking, and from oppression and inhumanity; he practises the higher and nobler virtues of beneficence and charity, and esteems it the business and pleasure of his life to go about doing good.

Let us now follow the perfect man, through all the vicissitudes of life to the dark valley of the shadow of death.

In affluence and prosperity, he nobly resists the temptations which beset him on every side, and amidst all the snares of ambition, of riches, and of pleasure, holds fast his integrity, and perseveres in the path of his duty.

Pious

Pious and devout, in a situation in which men are most prone to forget the God who made them; kind and compassionate, at a season when men are too often blind to the calamities and deaf to the supplications of the distressed; full of condescension and humility, under those smiles of fortune which so frequently elate the heart of man with pride; he may truly be said to “know how to abound.”

In an obscure station of life, he is diligent, contented, and thankful: diligent, to drive away care from his heart, and to make the best of that portion of external good which is allotted him; contented, from a firm persuasion that, under the government of Almighty God, “whatever is, is right;” and thankful, because he knows that a grateful heart is a tribute, which is at all times due, and which will be always

always acceptable to the Father of mercies.

Under the heaviest burdens of affliction, he bears up with a degree of firmness and fortitude, which displays the excellence of his virtuous and religious principles, and the superior greatness of his soul. Neither ridicule, nor contempt, nor reproach, nor persecution, nor torture, nor death itself can shake his firm resolve. Surrounded on every side with terrors, he retires within himself, assumes a more than manly courage, stands fast in the post of duty—and leaves the rest to heaven.

Lastly, at that season, when vice loses all her charms, and hypocrisy drops her mask, the perfect man, supported by conscious integrity, and animated with the joyful hope of a speedy and everlasting reward, retains all the firmness.

ness of his mind, and all the dignity of his character. When every external source of enjoyment fails, his internal treasures remain unimpaired; the virtuous habits which he hath acquired in this life, shall accompany him into the next, shall be raised to a degree of perfection at present unknown, and shall be rewarded with complete and endless felicity. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.”

After this account of the character of the perfect man, who does not see, who does not feel, that it deserves to be beheld with the highest admiration, and to be imitated with constant care, and unwearied resolution?

If you be ambitious of true honour, how can you so effectually obtain it as by aspiring after those accomplishments which are the ornament and perfection

perfection of human nature? Will it admit of a moment's deliberation, to determine, whether the man whose principal object of pursuit is the indulgence of his appetites, the amassing of wealth, or the acquisition of worldly honours, or he who makes it his chief concern to cultivate his intellectual and moral powers, to exercise benevolent affections and perform good actions to his brethren, and to conform himself to the will of his Maker, is the more respectable and worthy character? Can it be questioned, whether a life of sense and appetite and passion, by which we are allied to the beasts of the field, or a life of reason, wisdom, and virtue, by which we claim kindred with superior minds, and acquire a resemblance to the eternal fountain and standard of all perfection, be more laudable and excellent?

If you feel the warm emotions of benevolence towards your fellow creatures,

tures, and wish to be as useful to the world, as your abilities and circumstances will admit of; divest yourselves, as much as possible of all selfish and sordid views, and let all your actions be such as the strictest honour and the most perfect virtue require. Then will the influence of your good example extend, and the fruits of your good deeds be dispersed far around you; and you will become eminent blessings to your families, your friends, your country, and the world.

If you be concerned to support the dignity of the christian character, and to promote the honour of our holy religion, live under the influence of the important truths which it teacheth, and practise the strict virtue which it requires. The great end for which Christ appeared in the world, was by giving men the most rational and sublime principles of action, and the most

most refined and excellent precepts of morality, to “ put away sin, and bring “ in everlasting righteousness.” Every man, therefore, who is a sincere and consistent christian, will aspire after the highest possible attainments in goodness, and will be ambitious to arrive at “ the stature of a perfect man in “ Christ Jesus.”

Finally, if you be desirous to obtain the highest degrees of felicity, which you are capable of enjoying, be as perfect in all intellectual and moral accomplishments as your nature will admit of. If we entertain rational ideas of human happiness, and, agreeably to these, form a just estimate of human life; we shall be convinced that virtue much more generally meets with its reward in this world, than may at first view be imagined. It seldom fails of obtaining a high degree of esteem, and securing to itself a variety of outward advantages. It is certainly productive

of consolations and pleasures, independent of all external circumstances, which will abundantly outweigh all the inconveniences and hardships to which strict and determined virtue may sometimes be exposed. But besides all this, it ensures to its votaries a future state of honour and happiness, beyond their utmost deserts, and superior to their most exalted conceptions, but at the same time proportioned to their present attainments in goodness: for we are instructed by the gospel of Christ, that “as one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead,” and that the man who hath been eminently virtuous on earth, shall receive a “great reward in the kingdom of heaven.”

Animated and inspired by these considerations, banish from your hearts all languor and indifference, with respect to the great duties of morality and religion. Pursue the improvement and per-

perfection of your moral powers, with a degree of zeal and ardour equal to the importance of the pursuit.—Set before you the most excellent characters which have been exhibited upon the theatre of the world; and particularly the example of him, who was in fact what I have attempted to describe, a *perfect man*.—Imagine not that you have already attained, or are already perfect. If you form just notions of the nature and extent of virtue, and bring your dispositions and characters to their standard, by a fair and impartial examination, you will soon be convinced of your mistake.—Plead not in excuse for the imperfection of your character, that a man of strict and perfect virtue would have little security against the deceits which are practised among mankind, and little prospect of rising in the world; for to a wise and good man worldly prosperity is only a secondary consideration. Besides, your plea will not

not be admitted as valid, till you have fairly tried the experiment, by uniting the innocence of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent.——Say not, that such is the frailty of human nature, and so numerous are the temptations which surround you, that it is in vain for you to aspire after exalted attainments in virtue. For if it be not in the power of any man to be absolutely perfect, it is in the power of every man to “go on towards perfection.”

Leaving the things which are behind, let us then press forwards to those which are before, that we may at length obtain the prize of eternal life, set before us in the gospel of Christ:

Which may God of his infinite mercy grant unto us all ! Amen.

T H E

THE DUTIES OF RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES
CONSIDERED:

IN A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

O R D I N A T I O N

O F

The Rev. PHILIP TAYLOR,

At LIVERPOOL, *June* 21st.

A N D O F

The Rev. ROBERT GORE,

At MANCHESTER, *August* 23^d.

MDCCLXX.

ORDINARY

ORDINARY

THE REV. THOMAS TAYLOR

THE REV. ROBERT ROBERTS

THE REV. ROBERT ROBERTS

A N
ORDINATION SERMON.

HEBREWS xiii. 22.

*I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word
of exhortation.*

THE office of the christian ministry is of real importance to mankind; and the character of a christian minister, when properly supported, is truly worthy of esteem and respect. We do not, indeed, claim that kind of reverence, which superstition and ignorance have in all ages been accustomed to pay to ecclesiastical authority.

rity. We pretend not to take upon us the office of public religious instructors, by an immediate commission from heaven ; or to have received our investiture and authority from the hands of holy men, to whom this extraordinary power is supposed to have been transmitted, by an uninterrupted succession, from Christ and his Apostles. We desire no superstitious homage, no implicit faith, no servile obedience. But neither, on the other hand, can we apprehend that the character in which we appear, or the duties which belong to our station, are such as deserve to be treated with ridicule or contempt.

As christian ministers, our business is, to stop the progress of ignorance and error ; to discourage superstition ; to promote useful knowledge ; to reprove the vices of the age in which we live ; to lay open the secret springs of
of

of folly and wickedness in the human heart ; to awaken and preserve in the minds of men a just sense of the importance of virtue ; to remind them of the extent and variety of their obligations, as rational beings, members of society, creatures of God, and disciples of Christ ; and in a word, to employ all the powers of eloquence, and all the influence of good example, for the advancement of wisdom, virtue, and happiness among mankind. Is there any thing ridiculous, any thing contemptible, in such an employment as this ? Or, till ignorance and vice are banished out of the world (which from present appearances we have little ground to expect) can it with any shadow of reason be pretended, that such an employment is unnecessary, or that those who are engaged in it are a burden to society ?

It may perhaps be asked, What ac-

tual advantage is derived from the institution of this office? — I answer; much every way. By the public forms of devotion, a sense of religion, and a regard to the providence and government of Almighty God, are preserved in the minds of multitudes, who, without this institution, would perhaps soon forget, that there is a Power above, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. By the public lectures of instruction, men become acquainted with many important subjects, to which they would otherwise pay little attention; are reminded of faults in their characters, which would otherwise pass unnoticed; and receive frequent impressions in favour of virtue, which may reasonably be presumed to have a happy influence upon their conduct. And private advice and admonition, supported and enforced by a good example (both which are necessary to complete the character

ter of a christian minister) have doubtless, in numberless instances, been of important service to mankind.

Nor could these ends have been so effectually answered without the actual appointment of an order of men, whose immediate business it should be to conduct the public devotions of religious societies; to deliver discourses on the great subjects of religion and morality; and to perform the other duties of the ministerial office. To discharge these duties with propriety and advantage, requires a variety of peculiar accomplishments, and a degree of attention, which can scarcely be expected, but from those who have passed through a suitable course of preparatory studies, and have devoted their time and abilities principally to this object.

But after all, though public religious worship is in itself reasonable; though the appointment of an order of men to conduct it is expedient; the actual success of the christian ministry, must greatly depend upon the diligence and fidelity of those by whom this office is undertaken. On this account it is highly reasonable, that they should, at proper seasons, be reminded of the nature and importance of the character which they have assumed, and exhorted to take heed unto themselves and to their ministry, that they be found faithful; and it is with great propriety that this is made one principal part of the business of ordination.

It should, moreover, be remembered, that christian societies have also their duties; and that much depends upon the manner in which these duties are performed. You will not therefore

therefore think it an improper use of the time allotted for this part of the present service, if I remind you, my christian friends, of the duties which are incumbent upon you as a religious society, and urge upon you an upright and constant attention to these duties.

“I beseech you, brethren, suffer
“the word of exhortation.”

Suffer me, in the first place, to exhort you, to maintain a proper sense of the importance of religious institutions, and to be regular and constant in your attendance upon them.

It is a just ground of surprize and of lamentation, that indifference to the instrumental duties of religion is daily gaining ground amongst us. Whether it be that, in proportion as knowledge increases, men are apt to pride
P 5 themselves

themselves in calling in question the most obvious and important truths, and in treating the most sacred obligations as matters of trifling consequence ; or whether the foolish and absurd practices of enthusiasts, have induced the more thinking part of mankind to neglect even rational religion itself : whether it be, that the love of amusement hath so far captivated the hearts of men, in this age of luxury and dissipation, as to render them incapable of being serious in any thing but their pleasures ; or whether the concerns of business and the pursuit of wealth have so far engrossed their attention, that they “ care for “ none of these things :” or lastly, whether it be that men are too wise to be instructed, and too good to be made better :—to whatever cause it is owing, the fact is certain, that places of public worship are not so regularly and constantly attended as formerly, and

and that great multitudes entirely “forfake the assembling of themselves together” for the purposes of devotion. If our forefathers erred in laying too much stress upon the external forms of piety, we are gone into the opposite extreme, and treat them with culpable indifference and neglect. If their characteristic faults were enthusiasm and hypocrisy, ours are irreligion and licentiousness. So little are men at present governed by the genuine principles of piety, that the most trifling engagements of business, or the smallest enticements of pleasure, are sufficient to divert them from paying their public tribute of homage to the Maker and Lord of all. I would not be uncharitable; but from the prevailing taste and manners of the age I cannot help suspecting, that if the generality of mankind were not more powerfully influenced by a regard to their reputation and character, than

than by a reverence for the Almighty, the house of God would by this time be well nigh forsaken.

Guard yourselves, my brethren, with the utmost care against the contagion of such examples. Esteem it not a proof of good sense, or a mark of a liberal turn of mind, to trample upon the sacred obligations of religion, and to violate "the first and great commandment." While you have any mercies to acknowledge, any sins to confess, any virtuous habits to acquire or strengthen, or any need of support and consolation, say not, "It is in vain to serve God; and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" Till you are wise beyond all danger of being misled by ignorance or prejudice, and good beyond all possibility of farther improvement, think it not a useless employment of your time, to "watch at wisdom's gates,

“ gates, and wait at the posts of her
“ doors. Hear instruction, and be
“ wise, and refuse it not.”

Let me exhort you, secondly, to entertain just apprehensions of the nature and design of the several parts of public worship, and reasonable expectations from your ministers, with respect to the manner in which they should be conducted.

It is doubtless the design of those religious exercises which are immediately devotional, to give us an opportunity of expressing, in a public and solemn manner, those pious sentiments, which it becomes us to maintain and cultivate towards the Supreme Being. Now, since this is the case, it is evident, that nothing should be admitted into public prayers, which is not immediately fitted to awaken these sentiments; and that our sole object

ject in conducting them should be, to express the genuine feelings of the pious mind, in plain, natural, unaffected language. If, therefore, you expect that your ministers, in their public forms of devotion, should attempt to amuse your imaginations with philosophical descriptions of the perfections and works of God; to entertain you by the elegance of their composition, or the delicacy and refinement of their sentiments; to gratify your love of novelty by an endless variety of thought and expression; or even to inform your judgment, and give you useful lessons of instruction; you expect what would be foreign to the nature and design of public worship, and unfriendly to your improvement in a religious temper and character. Every thing of this kind can only serve to divert your attention from your own immediate and proper business in acts of devotion, which is to worship your
Maker.

Maker. While you are amused and entertained by the sentiments, language, or manner of the person who leads your devotions, it is scarcely possible that you should yourselves be properly devout. Let me therefore recommend it as a matter of great importance, to acquire clear ideas of the nature and design of public worship, and a just taste with regard to the manner in which it should be conducted. Remember that public devotions can only be beneficial to you, so far as they enable you to express and cherish the sentiments of genuine piety; and learn, to consider those prayers as the best and most useful, which you can with the greatest ease and advantage adopt as your own address to the Almighty; and to esteem those the most judicious conductors of your devotions, who fix your attention, not on themselves, but on the great object of your worship.

With

With respect to those discourses, which usually accompany the public exercises of devotion, let me exhort you, to remember that the principal design of them is to promote the practice of virtue and religion, and to judge of their merit solely by their aptitude to answer this great end.

Many persons, who pretend to be perfectly acquainted with christian doctrines, and profess a great zeal for the true christian faith, imagine their own system of belief so essential to the honour, and the very existence of christianity, that they esteem it the principal business of ministers, to avow and support the several articles of their creed; and hear sermons with no other view, than to judge of the preachers orthodoxy, and to be confirmed in their own opinions. There are others, who, entertaining confused, mystical, and enthusiastical ideas of religion, think

think all discourses dry and insipid, which do not rise above the level of common sense and real life. On the other hand, there are not a few who, having, by a little accidental reading and consideration, fully convinced themselves of the absurdity of many opinions which are generally received, and acquired a taste for subjects of critical enquiry and speculation, think it the great business of christian ministers, to oppose vulgar errors and prejudices, and to establish a rational—that is their own—system of opinions, in their stead. By such persons as these, no discourse is heard with pleasure, or spoken of with applause, in which the preacher doth not display his zeal against error; explain some controverted text of scripture in favour of his own system, inculcate some new and unpopular opinion, or discover uncommon refinement and depth of thinking.

Now

Now all these, however widely they differ from each other in judgment and taste, agree in treating plain discourses on the most obvious topics of practical religion and morality with indifference. In their estimation, a sermon, which attempts to establish no particular system, and discovers no critical skill, in which the preacher contents himself with inculcating in a plain and familiar address, duties which every one acknowledges himself bound to practice, is scarcely worthy of an attentive hearing.

But let me appeal, my brethren, to your understandings, let me appeal to your feelings, whether such discourses do in reality deserve that neglect and contempt, with which zealots of all persuasions and sects have affected to treat them. Is not virtue the proper happiness of human nature? Can any object be conceived of greater importance,

ance, than to discourage and restrain the progress of vice, to establish pious and virtuous affections, and to promote right conduct among mankind? Was not this the great end, for the accomplishment of which our Saviour Jesus Christ both lived and died? Do not men continually need to be reminded of their duty, and urged by every possible motive to the practice of it? Do not addresses of this kind (to make use of Lord *Bacon's* phrase) "come home to men's business and bosoms?" Are they not directly adapted to make those who attend upon them useful members of domestic and civil society; upright, kind and generous in their transactions with their brethren; sober and discreet in the government of themselves, and pious and devout towards Almighty God? And is not this of infinitely greater importance than to make them able disputants, judicious critics,

or

or even sound believers? Require not, then, such things from your ministers, as they apprehended would be inconsistent with the nature of their office, and with a proper attention to your most important interests. Entertain not so low an opinion of them as to imagine, that they will attempt to gratify your taste, or to establish their own reputation, at the expence of their usefulness, and your real improvement. Expect not, that they will meddle with opinions and subjects of debate, any farther than they are of evident importance as springs and motives of action; or that they will neglect the cultivation of your dispositions and manners, for the poor satisfaction of moulding your judgment by their own. Rest satisfied, if in imitation of the example of Christ, and in conformity to the true spirit of the gospel, they make it the great business of their public discourses to exhort
you,

you, “ to deny ungodliness and worldly
“ lusts, and to live soberly, righteously
“ and piously in this present world ;
“ looking for the blessed hope, and the
“ glorious appearing of the great God,
“ and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Suffer me, in the next place, to exhort you, my brethren, to attend upon religious institutions, with proper dispositions, and with a sincere desire of improving in piety and virtue.

For this purpose, let it be your first care, to perform the duties of religious worship with attention and seriousness. If, instead of worshipping your Maker, or hearkening to the voice of instruction, you suffer your imaginations to rove through scenes of amusement or business ; or indulge yourselves in indecent levities of behaviour ; or give way to an indolent
and

and drowsy indifference to the duties in which you pretend to be engaged; what can the most judicious and rational forms of devotion, or the most instructive and pathetic addresses, on subjects of the highest moment, profit you? How can it be expected that a prayer, or a discourse, which cannot find its way to your understanding, should penetrate your hearts, or influence your behaviour?

But it is not sufficient that in religious duties you be serious and attentive; it is likewise of great importance, that in the several parts of these duties, the powers and affections of your minds should be properly employed.

In public devotions, it is your duty, not only to hear and understand the prayers which are delivered, but to address them to the Almighty for yourselves,

yourselves, as expressive of the real sentiments of your hearts. Every individual should perform the acts of religious adoration, with lively emotions of veneration, love and joy; those of thanksgiving, with the genuine feelings of gratitude for the mercies which he hath received; those of confession, with a humble recollection of his faults, and serious resolutions of amendment; and those of petition, with a sincere desire of the blessings he supplicates, a devout sense of his dependence upon the Almighty, and a benevolent concern for the happiness of his fellow creatures. How far these pious sentiments do actually accompany your public devotions, is known only to God and your own consciences. I presume not to charge you with the neglect of your duty, in an affair which cannot come under human cognizance. I trust you have a witness in your own bosoms, that it

is your sincere desire, and habitual care, to worship your Maker in spirit and in truth. It cannot, however, be improper that you should sometimes (and especially on such occasions as these) be reminded, that no religious service can be either beneficial to yourselves, or acceptable to Almighty God, where the heart is a stranger, and that it is only “the fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much.”

In like manner, it is of the utmost importance, that you should attend upon public religious instruction, with right views and intentions. Esteem it the principal end of hearing sermons, that you may be made better by what you hear; and desire to be entertained, or even instructed, by pulpit-discourses, only so far as shall be consistent with, and subservient to
this

this great end. It is, indeed a circumstance extremely desirable, that a preacher's composition and address should be such as are adapted to engage the attention of his audience, and to give them pleasure. Simplicity and elegance of stile, and a natural, easy, and graceful delivery, are accomplishments which cannot fail of being highly agreeable, especially to persons of refined taste and liberal education. And it would be unreasonable to expect, that those who attend upon preaching should wholly disregard the ornamental qualifications of a public speaker. But to make these incidental circumstances the principal object of attention ; to come to places of public worship, chiefly in hopes of being entertained by the preacher's sentiments or manner, and with a view to admire and applaud his rhetorical powers ; is to make an improper and unworthy use of the

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seasons devoted to the purposes of religion, and to sink the preaching of the word of God to a level with theatrical entertainments. That this is a prevailing fault in the present age, too plainly appears, from the terms in which sermons are generally applauded or censured; from the eagerness with which those preachers are followed, who excel, or are generally said to excel, in oratorical accomplishments; and from the indifference and neglect with which the best and most useful discourses are commonly heard, when they happen to be delivered with an improper tone of voice, or to be accomplished with awkward and ungraceful gestures. You will not therefore deem it impertinent or unreasonable, if I take the liberty to caution you against this fault; and to exhort you, not to seek for pleasure at the expence of your improvement. Imagine not that the great end of preaching

preaching hath been answered, when you have been for a few moments entertained or amused; but be desirous that every discourse you hear, may make a good impresson upon your minds, and produce the fruits of righteousness in your lives. Attend upon public discourses, to be reminded of your duty; to acquire the knowledge of yourselves; to establish the principles of religion and virtue more deeply in your hearts; to learn greater circumspection and prudence in the conduct of life, and to improve in all the branches of a pious and virtuous character. And remember, that, how much soever you may be amused or even instructed by the sermons you hear, till these great ends are answered the word preached hath not profited you. "Take heed therefore how ye hear."

Let me farther exhort you, to promote as far as you are able, the peace and happiness of the religious societies to which you belong, and the interests of religion in general. If public worship be in itself an important duty, and highly conducive to the public good; every man is bound to do his part towards the support and success of religious institutions. Among the various ways by which this may be done, it is none of the least considerable, that a decent provision be made for the comfortable subsistence of those who are employed in the ministerial office. It is evidently the duty of all who attend upon public worship to contribute, for this purpose, according to their ability—a duty which ought not to be placed upon the same footing with acts of beneficence and charity, and which cannot be neglected without a manifest violation of the laws of honour and equity. But it is
as

as unnecessary, as it would be indelicate, to dwell upon this topic.

I therefore proceed to exhort you, from a regard to your own improvement, as well as to the happiness of your ministers, to treat them with that degree of candour, affection and respect, which is due to their character, and their office. While they claim no superstitious reverence from you, and exercise no priestly authority over you; while they discharge the duties of their office with fidelity, and are free from all just ground of censure in their private character, “esteem them
“ highly in love, for their virtues and
“ their work’s sake.” If they sincerely declare to you what appear to them to be important truths; though their opinions may not in every particular agree with your own, give them an attentive and candid hearing. If they faithfully remind you of the folly and
Q 3 danger

danger of a vicious course; if they venture to insist upon particular vices, of which they apprehend some of their audience to be guilty, or upon particular duties in which they think them defective; be not offended at the plainness or freedom of their address. Nay, if they sometimes take the liberty to perform the difficult task of private admonition, advice or reproof; treat not their faithfulness and affection with resentment or neglect; think not that they intrude into affairs in which they have no concern: but remember that both the nature of their office, and their personal friendship for you, require them to embrace every opportunity, whether public or private, of promoting your moral and religious improvement.

With regard to their conduct in private life, remember that they are men of like passions with yourselves,
and

and expect not from them a degree of perfection, which is inconsistent with the condition of humanity. If their general character be amiable and respectable, make charitable allowances for trifling foibles, or occasional failings. While they keep within the bounds of innocence; preserve themselves from that excessive love of amusement and pleasure, which would give them a habit of indolence and dissipation, and indispose them for the duties of their office; and support a manliness, decorum, and gravity of behaviour, suitable to their station; be not offended if they sometimes indulge themselves in those entertainments or exercises, to which their disposition and taste may incline them. Lay no unnecessary restraints upon the conduct of your ministers, and require not from *them* that preciseness and severity of manners, which you think
yourselfes

yourselves under no obligation to ob-
serve.

Farther to promote the interests of the society to which you belong, cultivate mutual good-will and brotherly love. Sensible that nothing would so effectually prevent your pleasure or improvement, in your attendance upon religious institutions, as disaffection and alienation of heart one towards another; avoid as much as possible every occasion of strife and contention. Let not interfering interests of life; let not different opinions in religion, create jealousies, debates, and animosities among you. Be always ready to sacrifice your private taste, opinions, or interests to the public good. Since you are partakers of the same nature, disciples of the same master, and fellow-worshippers of the same God; "love
" as brethren, and endeavour to pre-
" serve

“ serve the unity of the spirit in the
“ bond of peace.”

In fine, Let your concern for the honour and interest of religion extend, not to your own society alone, but to the world in general. Consider yourselves as related to all those who rank themselves under the denomination to which you belong, to christians of every sect and profession, and to good men of every religion and country under heaven. And chearfully contribute your part, towards the defence of religious liberty, the progress of useful knowledge, and the establishment of pure christianity, and true religion, in the world.

Suffer me, in the last place, to exhort you my brethren, to support a character agreeable to the profession which you make, and the advantages which you enjoy. You acknowledge
yourselves

yourself believers in God, and disciples of Christ. You are, from time to time, reminded of your religious and christian principles, instructed in the several branches of your duty, and urged to the practice of it by the most interesting motives. May it not therefore justly be expected from you, that you should excel in every thing that is amiable and praise-worthy? After such professions, and with such advantages, it is surely reasonable, that you should be distinguished by your pious regard to the providence of God in all the concerns of your lives; by your chearful submission to his appointments; by an upright, benevolent, and generous behaviour towards your fellow-creatures; and by the habitual regularity and sobriety of your manners. A conduct thus innocent, virtuous, and exemplary, mankind have a right to expect from you, as a testimony of the sincerity of
your

your religious profession; your ministers earnestly desire, as the most acceptable reward of their labours, and the surest support of the interests of religion and christianity in the world; your Maker enjoins, as the best expression of your subjection to his authority, and your gratitude for his mercies; and your own interests, both in this life and that which is to come, absolutely require. By your regard to the good opinion of your brethren; by your esteem and affection for your ministers; by your zeal for the cause of Christ; by your reverence for the authority of God; and finally, by your concern for your own welfare, “ we therefore beseech and exhort you, that, as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.”

T H E E N D.

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J. E. E. W. L.

